

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 - FOOD POVERTY

Thursday, 24 September 2020

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Meredith (Chair), Councillors Roberts, Russell and Smith

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Paul Foster	Emmanuel Church
Clive Ireston	Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network

Officers

Geraldine Mahney, Customer Services Manager

Tracy Tiff, Democratic and Member Services Manager

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Alan Bottwood.

2. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020 were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

4. CHAIR'S DRAFT REPORT

The Scrutiny Panel considered the Chair's draft report and made update and comment, as appended.

AGREED: That the report of the Scrutiny Panel is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 November 2020 for consideration and approval.

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Chair referred to the work that had been undertaken by Marcus Rashford; advising that as this Scrutiny Panel had concluded its evidence gathering and due to the current situation he had not agreed to the request to contact Mr Rashford to speak to the Scrutiny Panel about his Task Force and the work being done. It might be useful for Mr Rashford to be invited to speak at the Food Poverty Festival, should this recommendation of the Panel be approved by Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the Scrutiny Panel, the co-optees, internal and external expert advisors and Officers supporting the work of the Panel for their dedication and hard work during this Scrutiny Review

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny

Report of Scrutiny Panel 1 – Food Poverty

1 Purposes

1.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to:

- To examine the extent to which individuals and families are experiencing food poverty, the range of contributing factors and the changes that have been made to the way the Council and partners support residents during hardship.
- To review the impact and concentration of food poverty across the Borough of Northampton

Key Lines of Enquiry

- What are the impacts of food poverty?
- How widespread is food poverty in the borough?
- What strategic approaches are in existence to tackle food poverty?
- What approaches are in existence to reduce people's dependency on food aid, such as Food Banks? To receive an understanding of how food poverty is addressed
- To evaluate how the Borough Council, together with its partners, can collectively respond to food poverty
- To identify the specific issues relating to food poverty
- To identify the existence and impact of "holiday hunger"
- To identify how food poverty differs across the borough of Northampton and the reasons for this

1.2 A copy of the scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

2 Context and Background

2.1 Following approval of its work programme for 2019/2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting in April 2019 commissioned Scrutiny Panel 3 to undertake the review – Food Poverty. An in-depth review commenced in June 2019 and concluded in September 2020. Due to unprecedented situation of the Covid19 pandemic, meetings were cancelled during March 2020 and July 2020.

2.2 A Scrutiny Panel was established comprising Councillor Dennis Meredith (Chair); Councillor Cathrine Russell (Deputy Chair); Councillors Mohammed Aziz, Alan Bottwood, Emma Roberts and Zoe Smith. Paul Foster,

Emmanuel Church and Clive Ireston, Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network were co-opted to the Review.

2.3 This review links to the Council's corporate priorities, particularly corporate priority - improving the health and wellbeing of local people.

2.4 The Scrutiny Panel established that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

3 Evidence Collection

3.1 Background data, including:

- Presentation to set the scene: To identify the prevalence of the problem locally
- Relevant national and local background research papers
- Definitions – Food Poverty
- Causes of food poverty
- Best practice and successful initiatives in Northampton and comparable Local Authorities
- Relevant Council Policies and Strategies
- Relevant Statistics and relevant reports, including:

Poverty indicators

Demographics (national and Local)

UN report on food poverty

Institute of Fiscal Studies report on food poverty

- Relevant Legislation, including:
 - Child Poverty Act 2010
 - Changes to Universal Credit
 - Introduction to benefits and the impact
- Best practice external to Northampton

• Internal expert advisors:

- Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing, NBC

- Head of Housing and Wellbeing, NBC
 - Head of Revenues and Benefits, LGSS
 - Cabinet Member for Community Safety, NBC
 - Chair of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Community Safety Team
 - Cabinet Member for Finance, NBC
 - Section 151 Officer, NBC
- External expert advisors:
 - Community Law, Northampton
 - Child Poverty Action Group
 - Education Services, Northamptonshire County Council
 - Director of Children’s Services, Northamptonshire County Council
 - Community and Voluntary Sector
 - Northamptonshire Citizens Advice Bureau
 - RESTORE
 - Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council
 - Rapid Relief
 - Representations of the Sikh Community
 - Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, NCC
 - Head Teachers of local primary and secondary schools (written evidence)
 - Local Youth Clubs, including Community Spaces
 - Partnership Manager, Department of Work and Pensions

Site visits

3.2 Background reports and information

[Presentation to set the scene](#)

Progress regarding PC terminals in community venues are being investing and Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) are looking to put PCs in all of their Hubs.

Officers working in the Council’s One Stop Shop, each month donate items of food that can be donated to those in need. This is funded totally by the staff who do this mainly because they come into contact with people on a daily basis that require food donations and other assistance.

Food Banks are licensed to donate food. Should a family or individual be in real need for food but cannot obtain a food voucher, they can receive a food parcel from the One Stop Shop. Concern was raised that staff feel the need to provide such food parcels; it should be a more structured provision

Should someone need a food bank voucher they are required to complete a standard form that amongst other questions asks for details of the number of individuals living in the property. Individuals can receive three vouchers from an Agency – the purpose being to prevent dependency upon food vouchers.

Food Banks operate on different days around the borough.

3.3 Various Definitions of Food Poverty

There are various definitions of food poverty for example:

The definition of food poverty used by Restore: - *“Food poverty is the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet. It is about the quality of food as well as quantity. It is not just about hunger, but also about being appropriately nourished to attain and maintain health.”*

A key definition of deprivation used by local authorities is:

those areas (and their residents) which fall within the top 20% most deprived LSOAs nationally (i.e. Deciles 1 and 2 nationally). There are 422 LSOA’s in Northamptonshire. In the IMD 2015 release 69 of these were in the top 20% nationally, 29 in the 1st Decile and 40 in the Second.

A further definition of food poverty according to the Department of Health is *“the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”¹. It is closely related to household food insecurity which is the inability to be able to secure social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life². Hunger as a term to describe the physical feeling of insufficient food is used by a number of organisations working with people unable to afford food as a means of communicating messages to the wider public, including the Trussell Trust, FareShare, Magic Breakfast, and Church Action on Poverty. Hunger is one consequence of food insecurity*

¹ Department of Health, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan, 2005

² <http://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>

but not an inevitability. The Department of Health defines food poverty as: 'The inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.

3.4 Statutory and Social Overcrowding

Definition of Statutory Overcrowding

Two standards – the 'room standard' and the 'space standard' – are used to assess whether a home is 'statutorily overcrowded' under Part 10 of the Housing Act 1985.

If either or both of these standards are breached, the home will be deemed to be statutorily overcrowded.

The Room Standard

Section 325 of the Housing Act 1985 specifies that there is overcrowding wherever there are so many people in a house that any two or more of those persons, being ten or more years old and of opposite sexes (and who are not living together as a couple) have to sleep in the same room. Report Title Statutory and Social Overcrowding

For these purposes, children under the age of ten may be disregarded and a room means any room normally used as either a bedroom or a living room. A kitchen can be considered to be a living room provided it is big enough to accommodate a bed.

When interpreting this definition, a local authority looks at how the sleeping arrangements within the premises could be organised, rather than how they are actually organised.

This means, for example, that a man and a woman living as a couple with two children of opposite sexes and aged ten years or more who have two living rooms (for example, bedrooms) may not be statutorily overcrowded because each member of the couple could occupy a separate room with one of the children (of the appropriate sex).

Under Section 325 of the Housing Act 1985, there is no limit on the number of people of the same sex who can live in the same room. However, there may be a contravention of the space standard.

The Space Standard

The space standard involves the calculation (undertaken in two ways) of the number of people permitted for the dwelling. The lower number (of the two calculations) is the permitted number for the dwelling.

The first test is based on the number of living rooms in the dwelling (disregarding rooms of less than 50 square feet) and the following levels of occupancy:

- One room = two persons
- Two rooms = three persons
- Three rooms = five persons
- Four rooms = seven and a half persons
- Five rooms or more = ten persons plus two persons for each room in excess of five rooms

For the purpose of this test, a child below the age of one does not count and a child between one and ten counts as a half person.

The second test is based on floor areas of each room:

- Less than 50 square feet = no-one
- 50 square feet to less than 70 square feet = half a person
- 70 square feet to less than 90 square feet = one person
- 90 square feet to less than 110 square feet = one and a half persons
- 110 square feet or larger = two persons.

Northampton Partnership Homes' website contains advice on how housing applicants can establish whether or not they are statutorily overcrowded).

Meaning of Social Overcrowding

Although the term 'social overcrowding' is often used in Northampton, it is not a term that has any legal basis or definition.

It is understood that the term was first used many years ago to distinguish between statutory overcrowding and situations in which a household has fewer bedrooms than specified in the Housing Allocations Scheme Lettings Criteria).

'Social overcrowding' is not a term that is used by other local authorities. Many use the term 'overcrowding' to describe a situation in which a household has one bedroom less than they need, and 'severe overcrowding' to describe a situation in which a household has at least two bedrooms less than they need.

Assessment of Overcrowded Households on Northampton's Housing Register

At present, households that are overcrowded but not statutorily overcrowded will only be able to join Northampton's Housing Register if they have other housing needs or their accommodation is having a serious impact on their health or wellbeing.

Housing applicants who are statutorily overcrowded and eligible to join the Housing Register and will be placed in the Emergency Band of the Housing Register.

Development of West Northamptonshire's Housing Allocations Scheme

Work is underway to develop a new Housing Allocations Scheme for West Northamptonshire. This needs to be in place by 1 April 2021.

Officers from Northampton Borough Council and Northampton Partnership Homes have agreed that the new Housing Allocations Scheme should enable all overcrowded households to join the Housing Register if they are eligible.

Although consideration will need to be given to the merits of these and other changes, Officers are recommending that:

- Tenants of West Northamptonshire Council or partner Registered Providers who are living in West Northamptonshire, are severely overcrowded and have at least two bedrooms less than the number of bedrooms to which they would be entitled to under the Housing Allocations Scheme will be placed in Band A of the Register. This will take into account all rooms that can reasonably be used as bedrooms;
- Tenants of non-partner Registered Providers who are living in West Northamptonshire, are severely overcrowded and have at least two bedrooms less than the number of bedrooms to which they would be entitled to under the Housing Allocations Scheme will be placed in Band B of the Register. This will take into account all rooms that can reasonably be used as bedrooms; and
- Tenants of West Northamptonshire Council or partner Registered Providers who are living in West Northamptonshire, are overcrowded and have one bedroom less than the number of bedrooms to which they would be entitled to under the Housing Allocations Scheme will be placed in Band B of the Register. This will take into account all rooms that can reasonably be used as bedrooms.

3.6 **Core Questions**

3.7.1 The Scrutiny Panel devised a series of core questions that it put to its key witnesses over a cycle of meetings (Copy at Appendix B).

3.7.2 Key witnesses provided a response to these core questions at the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel held on 25 September 2019, 20 November, 25 November, 14 January 2020 and 2 March 2020.

3.7.3 Salient points of evidence:

Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing

- Hunger in young people can be seen as malnutrition and also slower development. Hunger in schools has an impact on education and concentration.
- There is a stigma around poverty

- Poor quality food is also poor value for money
- Zero hours contract often have an impact on poverty and food poverty
- There is a good referral system into food banks
- Help is available regarding budgeting from organisations such as CAB, Housing and Money Advice and Community Law
- A key role is to raise awareness and understanding around the causes and impact of poverty and food poverty. The Night Shelter is a good example of the positive impact good quality food can have on people's health and esteem
- Initiatives are in place as schools for those children that come in hungry such as free breakfast clubs. They are therefore provided with both a free breakfast and a free lunch during school days.
- NPH runs a food bank and also makes referrals. It is a food bank for Council tenants.
- Many homeless people are not receiving any benefits and a lot are suffering from extreme malnutrition
- Bed and breakfast accommodation has not been used very much for homeless families over the last 18 months. 35 hours of outreach work is provided on the streets each week.
- Should a family present as homeless at the One Stop Shop, they would be provided with food free of charge and officers would then assess their needs.

Head of Revenues and Benefits, Local Government Shared Services (LGSS)

- Revenues and Benefits does not have a direct statutory responsibility for food poverty; it administers the benefit system and collects Council Tax. The benefits system changed in 2009.
 - There will be full migration to Universal Credit from December 2019. The migration to UC started in December 2019 and was (pre-Covid 19) expected to go on to 2024 and potentially beyond.
 - As of 16 September 2019, there were 11,350 claims for housing benefit, in May 2019 it had been 14,000 – April 20, 10,194 and currently 9,846
 - There is a six-week waiting period for Universal Credit that has been causing issues and problems. Money management support is important for example pay bills such as rent first.
 - Childcare costs are paid four weeks in arrears- what does this relate to as we don't pay child care costs?
 - Since 2009 there have been other Welfare Reforms such as a freeze on the indexation for rents. There is also the bedroom tax, and a cap

to Benefits –Hardship funding for all CTR customers, an increase in the LHA rate and business support grants were also changes recently made due to Covid-19

- There is £9 million outstanding in Housing Benefit - is this debt ?
- 1,445 discretionary housing payments were made last year – that is for 19/20 in full, if you need the previous year, please let me know
- A Council Tax Reduction Scheme is in place; everyone now has to pay at least 35% of the Council Tax bill for their property but some Groups are protected.
- A Vulnerable Persons Policy is in place and an Income Assessment is undertaken.
- There are around 14,500 court summons each year.
- Since 2015, The Authority collects itself or uses debt collectors.
- Revenues and Benefits do signpost individuals to the relevant Agencies and Groups for independent advice and support .
- Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) receives localised funds, in 2013 it was capped and it is now often used for white goods, furniture etc – Not relevant there hasn't been a fund for over 5 years I would delete.
- The Crisis Loan System is administered by NCC
- £437,000 has been given out in discretionary housing payments this year – this is the total awarded for 2019/20, £271,00 had been paid by 30.09.19.

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety

- Food poverty can have a negative impact on both physical and mental health.
- There are clear links between levels of deprivation and food poverty. A key definition of deprivation used by local authorities is those areas (and their residents) which fall within the top 20% most deprived LSOAs nationally (i.e. Deciles 1 and 2 nationally). There are 422 LSOA's in Northamptonshire. In the IMD 2015 release 69 of these were in the top 20% nationally, 29 in the 1st Decile and 40 in the Second.
- A good indicator would be the number of children that receive free school meals and the areas in which they live. Such data would be available through public health.

- More than £900,000 is awarded to the community and voluntary sector by NBC each year. A number of these grants support food aid and food provision projects and are available for groups to apply to.
- Northampton Borough Council provides various grants to organisations that are providing food provision in the Town. These grants have been allocated through Councillors utilising their community fund at ward level and through the small grants scheme, which have supported organisations such as Elsie's Café and Re:Store.
- £900,000 has been awarded in grant funding in respect of food aid.
- The Cabinet Member Community Safety and Engagement would be meeting with the Director of RESTORE imminently regarding joint working
- There are a number of good schemes in the Borough that are set up to have an impact on 'holiday hunger'. The below list provides a list of those that we were aware of over the summer 2019:

Re:Store - 12.00 - 1.00 lunch, 1.00 - 2.30 Play activities primary school age 0 - 10. For free hot meals, referrals from schools - (Spring Lane and Castle Academy, pupil premium)

St David's Community Cafe - Thursdays 12.30 lunch, followed by Time for Tots 1.30 - 3.00. Children up to 12 yrs. welcomed, activities provided for them. Community Cafe open Tuesday and Thursday 9.30 - 12.30 for breakfast and snacks. Saturday 9.00 - 10.30, donations welcome.

Kidz Link, St David's church rooms. Wednesday 5.30 - 7.00. Games and activities for up to 12 yrs. Snack provided.

Castle Hill, Spring Boroughs- Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays 12.00 - 1.00 serving freshly cooked food for families.

Elsie's Cafe - Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10.00 - 2.00- free meal for children accompanied by paying adult. Bread to take away. (Would need funding to do this)

Martial Arts Academy - Summer Activity programme various town locations - Free activities 10.00 - 1.00. Water, fruit and snack provided.

FISH – Food in School Holidays every Thursday August 1, 8,15,22,29 12 – 2 at Blackthorn Community Centre. Free lunch for children and children's entertainer for families in Blackthorn Goldings and Rectory Farm. We are concerned about numbers at these

events so please only tell people in those areas about it. (led by Emmanuel Church, Growing Together and Blackthorn Primary school)

Director of Public Health, Northamptonshire County Council

[Comprehensive presentation](#)

Salient points:

It's important to define what we mean by "food poverty" so that we can properly understand what the impacts of this might be and to accurately measure how widespread this problem is.

Food poverty according to the Department of Health is "the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet"³. It is closely related to **household food insecurity** which is the inability to be able to secure social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life⁴.

Hunger as a term to describe the physical feeling of insufficient food is used by a number of organisations working with people unable to afford food as a means of communicating messages to the wider public, including the Trussell Trust, FareShare, Magic Breakfast, and Church Action on Poverty. Hunger is one consequence of food insecurity but not an inevitability.

A clear direct impact of not having access to a healthy diet is malnutrition. As illustrated in **Figure 1** below, the malnutrition that arises as a result of food insecurity can manifest as undernutrition, **hunger and underweight** but may also come in the form of **nutrient deficiencies with healthy weights** or **overweight/obesity**.

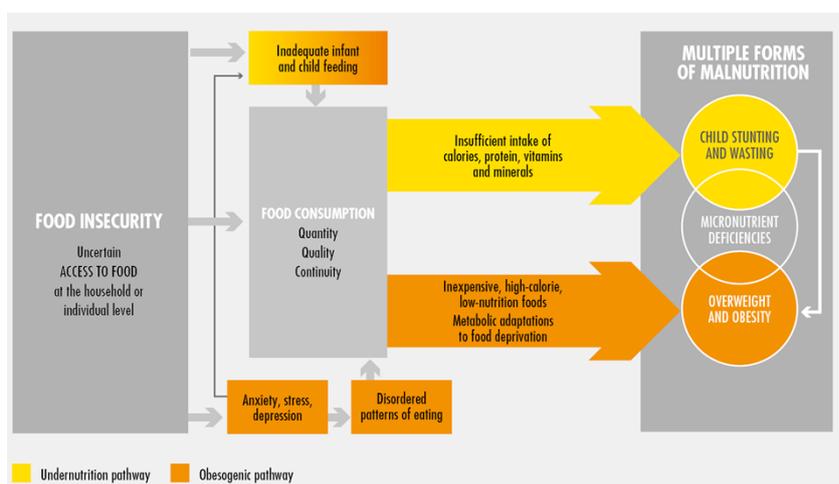
The poor health and wellbeing and risk of chronic ill-health related to food poverty are not only due to the direct dietary risks but also due to associated social and psychological impacts e.g. chronic stress related to food poverty and poverty more generally, poor school performance due to acute hunger, It is also important to consider the differences between acute hunger and chronic food insecurity.

³ Department of Health, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan, 2005

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>

Poverty has been further defined in terms of the way that it effectively excludes individuals from participation in what might be regarded as the customary life of society (Levitas, 2006).⁵

Figure 1. Pathways to multiple forms of malnutrition from food insecurity



Source: FAO The State of Food Insecurity⁶

Food poverty or food insecurity are challenging conditions to measure and there is a lack of robust or systematic measures in the UK. Other measures, however, can be useful in estimating the size of the problem.

Food poverty is clearly linked to poverty more generally and poverty can be measured in a number of ways. One useful metric is “income deprivation” which measures the number of people who are in receipt of various means tested benefits. In 2015 the total number of people affected by income deprivation in Northampton was 27,279⁷ of whom 7,806⁸ were children and 6,193⁹ older people.

Use of emergency food aid (i.e. food banks) can give an indication of the levels of need around acute food poverty. It should be noted that

⁵ Levitas, L. (2006) The concept of measurement and social exclusion, in C. Pantazis, D. Gordon and R. Levitas (eds.) *Poverty and social exclusion in Britain. The Millenium survey*. Bristol: Policy Press.

⁶The State of Food Security <http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf>

⁷ Income Deprivation domain of [Indices of Deprivation 2019](#)

⁸ [IDACI 2019](#)

⁹ [IDOPI 2019](#)

while the existence of emergency food aid provision reflects the growth of both episodic and chronic severe food poverty it measures just one aspect of this and so doesn't capture those who manage food insecurity in different ways ¹⁰.

Re;Store coordinate food parcels across 6 churches in Northampton Borough and in 2018 distributed 4500 parcels (website reference)¹¹. There are other emergency food aid providers (including those who provide meals to the homeless and rough sleepers) that are not included in this figure. Nationally, the Trussell Trust saw a 20% increase between 2017-2018 in the number of food parcels given out in the summer holidays¹².

The 2019 update to Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) identifies the top 20 most deprived small areas (lower super output areas – LSOAs) in the proposed West Northamptonshire . It shows that 19 of the 20 areas are in Northampton Borough and that one small area in the borough is within the 1% most deprived LSOAs in England (Bellinge Ward: Fieldmill Road area, Billing Aquadrome).

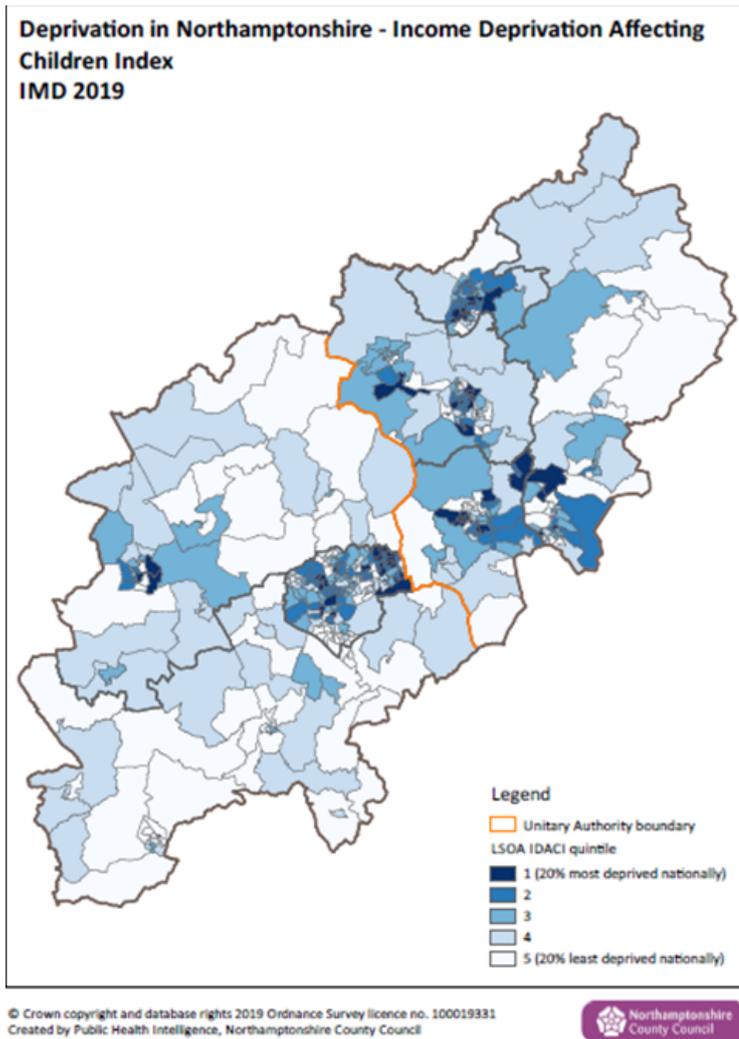
Another important factor to consider is accessibility of food, and in particular fresh fruit and vegetables. 'Food Deserts' describe areas where there are no shops selling affordable healthy food. This is particularly an issue for those with mobility issues or lack of access to transport.

Map 1. Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)
Northamptonshire 2019

¹⁰ <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2222/food-poverty.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.restorenorthampton.org.uk/>

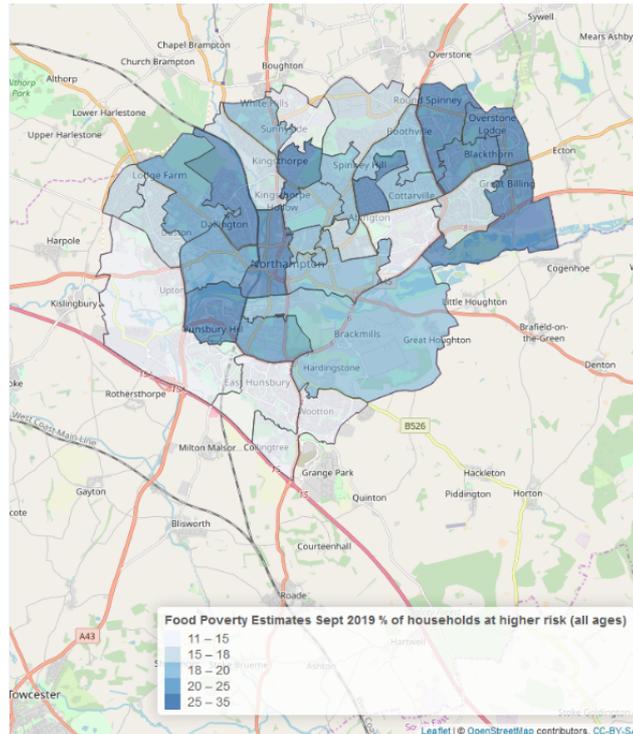
¹² <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2019/07/16/uk-food-banks-fear-busiest-summer-ever-ahead/>



The University of Southampton has developed a methodology¹³ to estimate risk of food poverty across local communities and it was last updated in September 2019. The map below shows the food poverty estimates at MSOA level across the borough of Northampton. Other presentations of the data are available [here](#).

Map 2. Proportion of households at high risk of food poverty in Northampton Borough 2019

¹³ [Identifying populations and areas at greatest risk of household food insecurity in England, D. Smith et al. University of Southampton, 2018.](#) Further details on methodology available from Public Health Intelligence, NCC.



In order to understand approaches to tackle food poverty it's important to understand the root causes of food poverty. An analysis by the House of Commons' Environmental Audit Committee "Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK" identified three themes relating to the causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition:

- Low incomes and rising living costs:
- Universal Credit and the benefits system; and
- Cuts to funding for local social care services.

Further to this, Sustain, in their guide to developing Food Poverty Action Plans suggest three broad approaches to tackle food poverty that complement the three key themes identified by the Environmental Audit Committee, namely;

Taking a preventative approach

- a. Improving access to financial and debt advice as well as maximising access to welfare and discretionary funds including fuel poverty funds.
- b. Improving access to healthy start vouchers, breastfeeding support and free school meal provision and access to affordable locally grown produce.
- c. Promoting fair incomes and the Living Wage

Shaping crisis provision (or more immediate provision)

- d. Improving access to food aid by developing signposting tools for frontline staff and ensure this is delivered in a non-stigmatising way.

- e. Improving nutritional value of food aid.
- f. Promoting greater coordination and networking of assistance providers.

Taking a wider approach

- g. Measuring and monitoring food poverty at a local level
- h. Using planning and business rate relief systems to shape local areas and support social supermarkets and community food growing
- i. Provide stable and affordable housing as well as access to energy efficiency measures
- j. Make reducing food inequalities a priority across a range of strategies and plans and/or integrate food poverty actions within a wider food plan

Innovative digital approaches can be employed as part of actions to address food poverty across these themes. In partnership with CAST (Centre for the Acceleration of Social Technology), Oxfam is exploring how digital technology can challenge and address the causes of food poverty in the UK.

A review by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust “Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK”¹⁴ gives the following recommendations for preventing need for food banks:

- Improve access to short-term benefit advances: increase awareness, simplify the claim process and improve data collection to identify support needs.
- Reform sanctions policy and practice: increase access to hardship payments, clarify communications about sanctions, mitigate the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered and address issues for Housing Benefit.
- Improve the ESA regime: ensure claimants are not left without income whilst challenging a decision made because of missing medical certificates or missed appointments.
- Sustain and improve access to emergency financial support through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes.
- Ensure Jobcentres provide an efficient and supportive service for all clients.
- Improve Jobcentre Plus Advisers’ awareness of, and ability to respond to, mental health problems.
- Improve access to appropriate advice and support.

Crisp et al 2016¹⁵ explores the value of community led approaches to reducing poverty in neighbourhoods, including:

¹⁴ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Foodbank%20Report_web.pdf

¹⁵ CRESR, 2016 *Community-led approaches to reducing poverty in neighbourhoods: A review of evidence and practice*

- Approaches impacting on the 'material' forms of poverty, reducing housing or fuel costs or creating employment opportunities
- Approaches impacting on the 'non-material' aspects by enhancing health and wellbeing, improving quality of housing, the condition of the physical environment and increasing levels of social participation.

Approaches are neighbourhood based; need adequate funding and are reliant on skills and leadership and a strong voluntary and community sector.

Approaches include:

- Voluntary action
- Food banks
- Community organising and social action
- Neighbourhood enterprise
- Community-based credit unions
- Developing physical assets
- Community-led housing

This conceptual distinction between material and non-material forms of poverty provides a useful framework for understanding the broad range of poverty-related outcomes that community-led approaches may have. This is summarised in Table 1 below. The framework enables distinctions to be drawn between interventions that might not prevent 'material' poverty but could mitigate some of the 'non-material' impacts of poverty that are part of the experience of poverty.

Table 1: Potential impacts on poverty of community-led activities

Activities may impact on 'material' poverty where they generate outcomes around:	Activities may impact on 'non-material' poverty where they generate outcomes around:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Jobs <input type="checkbox"/> Employment <input type="checkbox"/> Worklessness <input type="checkbox"/> Enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Local economic growth <input type="checkbox"/> Living costs (e.g. food, fuel or housing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> Housing (availability, quality or security) <input type="checkbox"/> Community safety <input type="checkbox"/> Physical environment <input type="checkbox"/> Social interaction <input type="checkbox"/> Community cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> Community empowerment

Nationally, the Government has recognised the need to understand better and measure the impact of food poverty. A national index of food insecurity is to be incorporated into an established UK-wide annual survey run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that monitors household incomes and living standards.

More widely, parliament, via the Environmental Audit Committee published a report in 2019 recommending greater action to reduce food poverty across the UK.

There are also a number of voluntary sector organisations who campaign around Food Poverty. Schemes such as 'The Sustainable Food Cities Award' incorporates a strand on tackling food poverty, diet related ill-health and access to affordable healthy food as part of the criteria for award.

Locally, alongside emergency food aid provision to address acute poverty there have been partnership efforts in recent years to address the root causes of food poverty.

Northamptonshire Community Foundation currently host the Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network who are active in promoting issues of food poverty across the

Some of the NCC Public Health Team's activities to address food poverty are listed below:

As part of the support for the Borough and Districts Health and Wellbeing Fora, a Public Health Healthy Town grant was made available in 2018-19 for them to apply for projects that support the health and wellbeing of local residents. Out of the 17 projects supported 5 projects are food related.

Breastfeeding – Health Visitors commissioned by the public health team provide infant feeding support including breastfeeding drop-ins as one of the key areas to reduce impacts of food poverty.

The Healthy Start Scheme is a statutory UK-wide government scheme that provides a 'nutritional safety net' for pregnant women and families on qualifying benefits and tax credits. Women who are at least 10 weeks pregnant and families with children under 4 qualify if the families received the relevant benefits. Pregnant women under 18 are also eligible, regardless of whether they receive benefits. The scheme includes food vouchers and vitamin supplements. The uptake of Healthy Start vouchers in Northampton borough in August 2019 was 56%. Nationally the uptake in this period was 52%.

A recent recruitment to a public health role has the function to develop a coordinated plan of existing work to tackle obesity across the County and identify key gaps that can be collectively worked on through a whole systems approach.

There are also projects around fuel poverty and healthy schools that seek to improve people's uptake of means tested support e.g. support to reduce fuel poverty and to provide free school meals.

Food poverty is an issue affecting the whole county and while there will be geographical and demographic variation the core issues, principles, actions and goals will be similar across all the boroughs and districts.

With the move to the two unitary authorities a way forward could be to use this issue to come together across the County and consider the following actions for local authorities recommended by Sustain:

- Developing a **food action plan** to tackle food poverty
- Improving the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers
- Promoting breastfeeding via the Baby Friendly Initiative
- Harnessing the value of children's centres
- Ensuring low-income families have adequate access to childcare
- Ensuring children's access to food 365 days a year
- Becoming a Living Wage employer and promoting the Living Wage
- Ensuring all residents have physical access to good food
- Supporting and enhancing meals on wheels provision
- Supporting financial advice services and providing crisis support

Food poverty is a complex issue and so has multiple and overlapping causal factors and impacts on health and wellbeing.

As noted by the Trussell Trust there are a widening group of people affected by food poverty, destitution and hunger¹⁶. Those vulnerable to food poverty are likely to be disadvantaged in other ways that have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Some specific associations with higher risk of food banks use include those who have a disability or health condition, lone parents and families with 3 or more children, those who have experienced adverse life events such as bereavement or loss of a job plays a role in food bank usage.

A national survey conducted by the NEU indicates teachers concerned over pupils missing meals during the school holidays¹⁷ and describe how the

¹⁶ Trussell Trust, 2019 The State of Hunger

¹⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/neu-survey-increase-amount-teenagers-going-hungry-during-summer-holidays>

impacts of lack of school meals during the holidays and how these are compounded by:

- Increased pressure on family food budget
- Increased costs in Child care
- Increased Fuel bills (even cooking food has a cost)
- Social contact is diminished
- School readiness and learning decline
- Family Stress elevated

There is national evidence of adults skipping meals to save money so that their children can eat. For example, in London in 2018 33% skipped meals¹⁸

One project funded by the NCC Public Health Grant – Food with Dignity – was set up to address the issue of holiday hunger. As part of its application it recorded:

KCU (Kettering Community Unit) food bank statistics and local feedback:

Between October 2017 and September 2018, 1,495 adults and 1,032 children were fed through the food bank. Since the start of rollout of Universal Credit (October 2018), there has already been over a 30% increase on the figures in food parcel requirements. In areas where full rollout has been going for 1 year, the average increase in food bank usage is 52%.

Researchers at Thomas Coram speaking with children on the impacts on their lives.¹⁹

- Children in low income families are going hungry and missing out on healthy food and social activities that their peers take for granted. Lack of money and food cause children physical pain, feelings of guilt and shame and a sense of social exclusion; Children in lone parents' families are at greater risk of food poverty than others, reflecting broad poverty trends. Since most lone parents are mothers, the health implications of parental sacrifice are gendered;
- Free school meals are sometimes delivered in a discriminatory and stigmatising way and often don't buy enough to fill someone up.

They recommended:

¹⁸ GLA, 2018 Final London Food Strategy

¹⁹ CPAG 2019 Living Hand to Mouth

- Healthy free school meals should be available to all children at school. Solutions to food poverty must address the root causes of low and irregular wages, inadequate benefits and the high cost of essentials that leave parents struggling to make ends meet.

Northamptonshire County Council supports disadvantaged groups who are vulnerable to food insecurity through a number of its statutory services as well as non-statutory offers.

The Adult Learning Service provides a “healthy cooking on a budget” course to provide communities with skills to prepare healthy meals with fruits and vegetables while

As noted above the Public Health within NCC provides support around reducing the burden of food poverty in the following ways:

- Intelligence –
 - The public health team have a responsibility to produce Joint Strategic Needs Assessments that identify local health and wellbeing priorities.
- Commissioning –
 - Through our commissioned services (primarily the Public Health Nursing Service) we:
 - Work with health visitors to improve uptake of Healthy Start scheme
 - Maintain level 3 accreditation for the Baby Friendly Initiative as part of the public health nursing contract.
 - Work with health visitors to promote breastfeeding as part of infant feeding offer
- Partnership and project working-
 - Our work also includes areas that have an impact on the determinants of food poverty including:
 - Projects working with schools to improve uptake of free school meals.
 - Projects to reduce fuel poverty and address other wider determinants including access to training and employment will contribute to reducing food poverty.
 - Obesity prevention activities including promoting cooking on a budget skill and shaping food environments to reduce accessibility of fast food.

Bringing together local leaders

Identify a strategic group to come together and map the need, current provision and develop a way forward across:

Tackling the underlying causes of food poverty

This includes working on local economic development, access to training and good quality jobs as well as a living wage and improving access to benefits.

Improving access to existing support for those at risk of food poverty

This includes improving uptake of free school meals, healthy start vouchers and other related support for prevention of acute food poverty.

Working at local community level to address food poverty

This includes improving access to affordable healthy foods through working on local community growing schemes and working with local businesses.

Pupil premium for deprivation is provided to schools on the basis of the number of pupils on the school roll that have ever eligible for FSM, (including those not currently eligible for FSM). Pupil Premium is also awarded on the basis of other elements of need e.g. children who have previously been “looked after children” and children of those previously in service in the armed forces.

Nationally, data on pupil premium values is reported according to the upper tier authority or parliamentary constituency that the school is located in and not lower tier authorities.

Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility, conversely, is available at borough level and is presented below:

Table 2. - Free School Meals Eligibility - January School Census 2019

District	% Eligible	Eligible	Total on Roll
Northamptonshire	10.4%	12300	118504
Corby	12.5%	1598	12831
Daventry	9.3%	1009	10897
East Northants	8.6%	1022	11920
Kettering	10.2%	1688	16517
Northampton	11.7%	3934	33642

South Northants	4.5%	812	18097
Wellingborough	12.3%	1543	12513
PRU	47.5%	96	202
Special	31.7%	598	1885

Public Health promoted the development of a food poverty strategy and note that the process of developing a food poverty strategy can of itself have wider impacts such as:

- Raising the profile of food poverty, especially with local decision-makers
- Developing a shared positive vision
- Creating a sense of empowerment for experts by experience
- Empowering diverse groups to raise their voices to call for food justice
- Ensuring the local council and other partners take ownership of agreed actions
- Sharing of good practice across local authority boundaries to support specific projects²⁰

Partnership Manager, Department of Work and Pensions

- Unemployment rate is 3.7% and is the lowest since the 1970s. More people have moved into work.
- The Department of Work and Pensions works closely with many organisations to support deprived areas and has outreach workers.
- “Entitled to calculation” can be undertaken and Officers can then look at the individual’s circumstances. Individuals would never be asked to move from a Legacy Benefit to Universal Credit unless this was financially better for them. Officers help individuals make best use of the income that they have.
- Universal Credit pays more the less an individual earns. It is based on earnings. If an individual is on a zero hours contract and does not work at all this then remains consistent; a taper for Universal Credit is detailed on the website of the Department of Work and Pensions.
- The employer must notify HMRC of the earnings of each employee.

²⁰ Developing food poverty action plans 2019, Sustain

- There is huge process that takes place before sanctions are implemented. Sanctions are the last thing that HMRC wants to introduce. The aim is to get the individual's money right and ready from the first assessment.
- The potential causes of individuals having to use food banks can be considered this to be mismanagement of money. HMRC can do entitlement assessments.
- HMRC works collaboratively with partner organisations to help people. It has a claim commitment but it needs individuals to tell officers about their circumstances. Individuals can contact HMRC for assistance.
- The Partnership Manager goes to Corby and Towcester food banks and works with them to see what their income is and assist them. Sarah Holton confirmed that she was very happy to attend a food bank in Northampton and work with users. Housing is always going to be an issue as rents can often be very high; HMRC cannot influence the rents. Costs of housing is often higher than housing benefit of the housing element of Universal Credit.
- HMRC has partner organisations that can assist people with claims.
 - DWP has a visiting team.
 - The Universal Credit app is easy to use.
- Under a Legacy contract, should individuals work more than 16 hours a week their benefit would be reduced and their claim closed. With Universal Credit, if an individual's earnings fluctuated – e.g. more earnings, less credit the account would only close if they earned more than Universal Credit. If the job comes to an end, they can notify change of circumstances and a re-assessment is done.
- There is a programme of training in place that comprises 39 vulnerabilities. Mental health training includes suicide and ex-offenders. She highlighted that her Office is not a trainer to give support regarding mental health but they can and do signpost.
- It was realised that some individuals are fearful to go to the Job Centre. There are lots of posters in the Job Centre regarding partner agencies.
- A lot of outreach takes place through schools and advice can be given.
- The Partnership Manager regularly visits NBC and is part of the Welfare Reform meetings; that comprise a number of partners. Improvements come from these meetings.

Chief Executive, Hope Centre

- Food poverty is just one way of looking at poverty as a whole. Food poverty is not some separate thing: it is labelled in this way simply because in a world of surplus food, people think they can ameliorate it with the surplus they have or is available. The term is superfluous: we are talking about poverty. But if it helps the public to become motivated about poverty as a whole, because they believe they can make a difference, as with homelessness, then it has awareness value. Therefore, poverty impacts on health, wellbeing, mental health, child development, obesity/malnutrition, dental poor health, crime, unemployment, future prospects

and civil harmony. An unequal society is bad for itself, as studies such as the 'Spirit Level' have shown.

- National data suggests that as many as 14m or 21% of the population are in some form of poverty²¹. Given that Northampton is comparably poorer than the average for Britain by a ratio of 1:1.12 (based on salary average), this suggests that in Northampton, with a population of 225000, there are 53000 people (or 23.52%) in relative poverty. These are people who on a weekly basis experience issues of poverty which include issues with food. Within this total, 9.33% can be defined as destitute, or 4944 people²². Realistically, this can be seen as a likely shorthand figure for those who might access regular food aid provision but others will need help periodically from sources beyond their immediate families.
- Transferrable Canadian data²³ suggests that no more than 20% of people in the highest levels of need ever approach food aid provision, for reasons of stigma etc.
- The above figure includes a disproportionate number who are of ethnic minorities; and women are generally thought to most likely to offer food to their children before themselves, meaning even within poor families, women are more likely to experience food issues. Obviously, the figures are averaged, so this masks concentration in areas of greatest deprivation.
- The government gives some tax encouragement to food retailers to share surplus food. Beyond this, there is no strategic action beyond broader welfare provision. That which is done is solely at the inspiration of individual organisations, both statutory (e.g. Partnership Homes, NCC Public Health, as supplied) and mainly charitable, often church based. There is a county food poverty group but this is not strategic; it largely engages only in strategic campaigning. It does very little to co-ordinate or support food aid providers nor engineer any organised supply or sharing of food.
- Within the voluntary sector nationally the Trussell Trust is in essence a franchise system for local foodbanks, from a Christian perspective: it has no local co-ordinary function, even amongst its own registered foodbanks. IFAN is a loose alliance of other providers, of which Hope is a member (and former board member) but does little co-ordination, mainly focusing on national campaigning.
- Within the retail industry there is no strategic co-ordination, either nationally or locally. Fareshare is a national charity with regional (not local) branches supported

²¹ <https://fullfact.org/economy/poverty-uk-guide-facts-and-figures/> ;
<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07096>

²² https://naccom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/destitution2018_0.pdf

²³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11266-018-0039-2>

by various companies, but it is not strategic. If you want food from Fareshare, you contact them and they arrange this, but it is chaotic and unstrategic, and often of variable quality, focused on short life, sometimes unusable items near use by date, which is not supplied in a co-ordinated way, can become unusable between their supply to food aid providers and its distribution to customers. It contains little ambient food. This is a just a fragment of the food supplied by supermarkets, which is offered chaotically to charities every day of the week, wasting time and money with multiple wasted journeys for a smashed pallet of rotten veg or pop, as is often the case. Much of that which they give away has no nutritional value.

- The closest to strategic food aid is not in practice organised at all by any single entity, but each year, in two waves, supplies a vast amount of the food that is in turn supplied by food aid providers across the UK. These are the Christian festivals of Harvest and Christmas, where Churches and Schools (and the general public, at Christmas) voluntarily choose to collect and supply food to charities like Hope and others. It is co-ordinated, if at all, only by organisations like Hope, to try to co-ordinate donations to enable their management and not become overwhelmed. This is a vast operation and can involve in Hope's case perhaps 30 tonnes of donated ambient long life items being gathered, collected, sorted and stored in two quite short, concentrated periods. Because of Hope's size and efficiency, we are the closest to offering a structured way of managing what is in effect a spontaneous outpouring of kindness, but even we struggle at Christmas where we receive as much in clothes as food. If we have surplus, we then pass on to others (there is a degree of sharing amongst foodbanks generally, it isn't structured, it just comes from relationships and mutual respect).
- Because of this seasonality, most foodbanks and Hope are running low after Easter 2020, with real issues later in the summer 2020.
- There is a real need for structured leadership of local food aid, with co-ordination to get short life food to organisations who can use it best; to co-ordinate pickups and manage the supermarkets. In practice there is competition, for the supermarket food, where slots to access their offerings are fiercely fought over. Some providers are especially competitive.
- Hope is moving to seeing its large warehouse (the single biggest in the county, by some distance) as being a community food hub where we, through size and organisation and funding, can support smaller foodbanks to access food through us. We would welcome opportunity to do this on a more structured basis, becoming a local distributor to other local food aid projects, a role really needed.
- There are two broad ways of looking at why people are food poor: one, that they are feckless, lazy, can't manage the money, don't know how to cook, have too many children, are drug addicts, spend their money on fags etc etc. The second is that the low level of wages and benefits, in relation to other costs, like food, travel,

and most of all, housing, mean that regardless of their personalities or individual characteristics, they are largely poor because they don't have enough money, including if they are working. Hope would generally recognise the latter view as being more broadly accurate. The best way to reduce such poverty would be a functioning welfare state or incomes policy with government commitment to ending poverty but sadly this not the case, as poverty increases daily and will likely get worse. The solutions to this at individual level may include education and teaching, but we are not aware of much structured work of this type and are in any case, secondary to improved income levels.

- At the local level a commitment by the council and pressure on its contractors to become Living wage employers would help, setting an example and applying leverage.
- In terms of activity within food aid settings, Hope supports the progressive approach in part of the food aid movement as members of IFAN. This model of practice includes such activity as:
 - Campaigning against low wages and benefits
 - Growing food locally
 - Support for people to learn new skills and get better paid work
 - Empowering service users to be voices for change, improving confidence etc
 - Sale based methods of food aid, such as social supermarkets, selling food at proper prices, rather than making it entirely charitable.
- Hope does all these (see 'Big Hunger' MIT 2017 by Andy Fisher for further examples of such initiatives). There are a number of other examples of progressive work but these are not means of reducing dependence on food aid but do have other value, such as refusing to supply large quantities of unhealthy food to users, not requiring referrals by health or social care professionals, not limiting to 3 parcels in crisis only, dignified offer of food, no evangelising as a condition for food etc).
- It is sometimes suggested that the addition of wrap around services can reduce continuing use of food aid. This includes benefits advice, access to drugs, alcohol and mental health support, plus education. All of these are potentially useful and Hope makes all of these available. However, they should be used in the context of the measures above and not conditional; i.e. there can be no assumption that people must take such services up to access food aid. There should be no presumption of need for such services as they are only in some cases the cause of need. Whether better take up of already inadequate benefits provides any real solution is arguable. Even where people have everything they are entitled to, they still experience food poverty.

- The benefits system and proper wages are the most effective methods.
- Aside from small scale efforts conducted by specific agencies and groups for their own customers, and the work carried out by Partnership Homes and the educational role of Public Health, previously submitted, the overwhelming response at any scale is from the voluntary sector and the churches.
- The churches offer foodbanks, Hope offers a social supermarket, where food and toiletries are supplied at charge, usually 1/3 or less of retail price, with lots of free items (sanitary products, toothbrushes and toothpaste etc). People pay a membership fee of £2 a month, but thereafter can attend every week, whereas in foodbanks people are often restricted to 3 visits in crisis, although often that is relaxed. You often have to be referred to foodbanks; you can self-present to Hope, our only condition being evidence of benefit status, including in work benefits.
- The other main distinction between foodbanks and Hope's offer is the volume of fresh food, especially veg and fruit. Many foodbanks mostly have access to ambient food only, and have much more limited amounts of fresh. This reflects the donation pattern. Hope avoids this by growing a lot of veg ourselves on our extensive allotments, and by sourcing fresh food. Some foodbanks grow a little veg themselves, but not in the serious manner Hope attempts (as an example, we have 14x as much growing land as Re: Store).
- There is some wrap around support at some local foodbanks, and at Hope. We have a student social worker attending most sessions to refer into Hope's wider provision. This is unconditional in offer.
- We feed about 250 people a week.
- There is also Elsie's café, or Shop Xero. Technically this is not a food poverty project, as anyone can go in and buy; its main ethos is food waste rather than poverty, though inevitably people on low incomes go to their shop, so it makes some contribution.
- It should also be recognised that Hope's day centre and street-based food distribution offers food support to some of the most destitute, including the homeless. Long before there were food banks, there were soup kitchens, feeding not just homeless people, as they still do. We see up to 130 people a day in the Hope day centre.
- Greater co-ordination of food aid would be welcome, but not necessarily by the Borough, but the Borough can be influential in encouraging this, as could NCC. Food aid is a voluntary sector/faith community thing, and given so little funding is made available, attempting to co-ordinate that which it does not fund would not be appropriate. If funding were available then it would be a different matter, but the

key role and leadership of the independent sector should be recognised and retained.

- We have talked about setting an example by wages etc earlier.
- The Borough and NCC could also make larger amounts of land available for growing veg, but this would need revenue support for gardeners. A local sustainable food strategy would be a good idea, as Hope played a significant role within during 2018 but has been unable to continue due to other pressures in 2019.
- Making available free or discount warehouse space to enable Hope or others to organise and store food would be a help. Our current warehouse is a major financial challenge. Making shop space available would be really helpful.
- The shortage of food to provide to people in need is the single, overwhelming issue.
- The overwhelming canard of food poverty is that it can be 'solved' by greater use of food 'waste', or surplus food, mainly from supermarkets. Supermarkets are becoming very adept at managing their stock lines so the amount of fresh, short life food they have is reducing all the time. We have said before, what they make available is literally only the things they cannot sell, much of which is very unhealthy. Shops give away almost nothing fresh, and little of nutritional value, and they never supply ambient in volume, as profit rules here. You can access better stuff through upchain communication with the industry via Fareshare etc but locally only really Hope and Shop Zero are organised enough to do this, and again, volume is really quite limited and in practice Hope and others pay to receive this, it's not free.
- Most of what Hope offers has been donated by the general public. There is quite simply not enough food in *any* category available to feed all of the people who could be in need or even might seek help. If all of the most acutely in need group came in for food aid, i.e. the c.5000 people identified above, the collective food aid providers of Northampton simply could not feed them. We could do so perhaps for a few weeks after Christmas, when our stores are full, but they would be emptied before Easter. There simply is not enough donated food, or food waste available to meet the potential level of need out there at the present time. To achieve this would require food retailers to donate a much higher volume of food, including fresh produce and ambient food at scale, and the general public to donate vastly more, and for a much larger amount of food to be grown by Hope or others. This is not a matter of small-scale tinkering, but really significant change in behaviour and attitude by everyone, including advertising to overcome stigma and encourage take up.

- Hope is exploring sourcing fresh or even ambient food on the wholesale market and will trial this in 2020. This will effectively just be a shop where we don't aim to make the excessive profit of the ordinary food retail sector, but do cover costs, where access is again restricted to those on low incomes. Lease of a building or shop at zero cost would be a great help here, enabling us to keep the food price low.
- Holiday hunger is simply another way of describing poverty, breaking down food poverty into yet another category.

Deputy CEO, Northamptonshire Community Foundation and facilitator of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network

- Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network was convened in 2012 as part of the community leadership role of Northamptonshire Community Foundation when it recognised as a grant maker and funder an emerging trend of an increasing number of food banks and food aid providers applying for funds and the increase of local communities experiencing food insecurity
- During 2013 and 2014 the community foundation received £10,000 over the two-year period to convene the network and support the strategy of the council to tackle poverty in Northamptonshire. Other key members of the network were also funded including Phoenix Resource Centre receiving £10,000 per year over two years to provide storage and transport support to sharing resources between food banks. This funding ended by 2015.
- Since 2016 Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network has strategically aligned with a network of food poverty alliances through the national End Hunger UK campaign and commits to campaigning, training and events. Local campaigns and events have included launching a Fair Deal for Kids appeal with Northampton Chronicle and Echo: <https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/how-can-8-400-northampton-children-be-living-hand-to-mouth-in-2018-we-relaunch-fair-deal-for-kids-campaign-1-8445606> , End Hunger UK campaign week, media and campaign training for network members, regular press releases of food insecurity, working in partnership with Oxfam to bring a food insecurity exhibition to Northampton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQmEEjBUiSM> , promoting the findings of the Children's Future Food Inquiry, working on a campaign with BBC Radio Northampton focusing on child food insecurity and a programme of events bringing in national charity and aid agencies to talk about policy and best practice to tackle food insecurity. Northamptonshire Community Foundation continues to fund members of the network and key food aid providers to deliver their services. The End Hunger UK Campaign seeks to raise awareness of food poverty and is

supported by a coalition of national charities and local food poverty alliances including Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network. It calls on the Government to do their part to address the root causes of food poverty and ensure public policy reduces rather than exacerbates food poverty. We also provide an online food aid directory. A recent campaign win is the commitment of the measurement of food insecurity by the Government. The first statistics are due for release in April 2020: <https://www.endhungeruk.org/2019/02/27/campaign-win-uk-government-agrees-to-measure-household-food-insecurity/>

- Government, councils, health bodies and other statutory agencies should play a central role in reducing food poverty in the UK. This should complement the role of the voluntary and community sector. Action by government, councils and others should address the root causes of food poverty and avoid unreasonable demands being placed on charities, faith organisations, volunteers and others responding to local need.
- The Department of Health defines food poverty as *‘The inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.’*
- Food poverty currently affects 8.4 million people in the UK who struggle to get enough to eat. This includes many households with people in work, families with children, as well as older and disabled people.
- It can affect children who lack free school meals during the holidays; parents on low incomes going without food so that their children can eat; working people whose low wages leave them struggling to buy healthy food; or older people unable to prepare meals without support.
- Hunger and unhealthy diets are symptoms of poverty. The root causes are the structural inequalities in household incomes and access to food. This includes low and insecure wages impacted by zero-hour contracts and/or pay that does not reflect the minimum living wage; an inadequate welfare safety net; lack of access to affordable and healthy food.
- The government must urgently address these inequalities. All households must have enough money to thrive, not just survive, through a living wage or an adequate welfare safety net, and healthy food should be more readily available and less expensive than unhealthy food.
- Key local contributory factors identified by members of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network on rising food insecurity and child food insecurity:
- Housing – particularly the number of families in temporary accommodation, no of families in overcrowded accommodation e.g. family of 2 adults 2 children are now

not classed as overcrowded if they live in a one bed flat. Many of our families live in these cramped conditions – how can this help family life?

- Universal credit – and the rise of food bank usage
 - Long term impact on children – being raised in poverty with parents who are not supported and who are unable to offer aspiration
 - Reduction in funding for essential services – CAMHS, Social care – thresholds getting higher so that more people are not getting any support
 - Demise of services for families – closure of children’s centres, cuts to support voluntary organisations
 - lack of services and that in our area it was really just us, Free2Talk and the schools
 - Schools could play a role to encourage both local and national Government to take matter seriously---real lack of awareness
 - Theresa May AS Prime Minster offer of policy to support those who are ‘just about managing’; instead the numbers have increased and many more people are struggling – people in work are in poverty. Nationally, there are not enough policies that are not accommodating people who are working but struggling.
 - Locally, the issues around Sure start are still manifesting itself – many of the above low-income families would use that agency for advice and consultation and also exacerbated by the whole cut to library services. Many projects have closed down or reduced their service offer which has a knock-on effect.
 - There’s an expectation that a voluntary organisation will be picking up a lot of this - they too are struggling to meet the needs.
 - There is a lack of staffing resources and so there is a lack of collaborative problem solving between public services and charities.
 - Brexit will add to the above pressure as policies stand and has overtaken the above issues relating to poverty.
 - Universal credit, especially for people who had never had to budget for a month at a time and for the long first period when you first go on it.
 - Housing - both NPH and private landlords and how many families we come across are living in conditions listeners would be shocked by for example people are now expected to use their living space as a bedroom so we have families with 2 young children in a one bed flat etc
 - Effects of long-term unemployment and also how difficult it is to start work when you know if you come off universal credit and the job then doesn’t work out you will have to wait another 5 weeks for any payment to come through.
-
- Key evidence and data submitted by the Deputy Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Community Foundation and facilitator of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network:
 - **United Nations Philip Alston Report on extreme poverty in the UK 2019:**
<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>
 - **Summary:** The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, undertook a mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018. Although the United Kingdom is the world’s

fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated. The social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets, which have eliminated many social services, reduced policing services, closed libraries in record numbers, shrunk community and youth centres and sold off public spaces and buildings. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos. A booming economy, high employment and a budget surplus have not reversed austerity, a policy pursued more as an ideological than an economic agenda.

- **Poverty Report:** <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/social-metrics-commission-2019-report/>
- **Summary:** More than 14 million people, including 4.5 million children, are living below the breadline, with more than half trapped in poverty for years, according to a new measure aimed at providing the most sophisticated analysis yet of material disadvantage in the UK. The measure seeks to forge a fresh political consensus between left and right over how to define and track poverty, with the aim of encouraging better-targeted poverty interventions, and making it easier to hold politicians to account. It finds poverty is especially prevalent in families with at least one disabled person, single-parent families, and households where no one works or that are dependent for income on irregular or zero-hours jobs.
- **Children's Future Food Inquiry:** <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/childrens-future-food-inquiry/>
- **Summary:** In a society that believes in compassion and justice, it is unacceptable that children's development is being restricted by the effects of poverty. The number of children experiencing symptoms of food insecurity, or whose family income is evidently insufficient to afford a healthy diet amounts to between 2.5 and 4 million; between 20% and 30% of all children in the UK. We cannot allow this to continue. One in three children (4.1million) are living in poverty in the UK. For their families to be able to afford the Government's recommended diet, they would have to spend an estimated 35% of their income on food, once their housing costs have been taken care of. This is not a realistic option, given the restrictive effects of the rising cost of living, prevalence of low-paid, insecure jobs, and the freeze on benefits. On average, after housing costs, households with

children spend around 18% of their income on food. A proportion of children living in poverty experience food insecurity. UNICEF estimates on the basis of a small but nationally representative survey that 2.5 million (19%) British children live in food insecure households. This means that there are times when their household does not have enough money to acquire enough food, or they cannot buy the full variety of foods needed for a healthy diet. The devastating consequences Hunger is an extremely debilitating experience. It damages physical health. It is a cause of great personal distress. It is a social harm. Food insecurity brings profound anxiety and stress into family life which can trigger depression, aggressive behaviour in children, a sense of hopelessness, and overwhelming stress for parents struggling to give their children the best start. It affects children's school attendance, achievement and attainment: children who are hungry in class cannot concentrate or may be disruptive. In addition, the long summer holidays are estimated to result in weeks of learning loss for some children through a combination of social isolation, low levels of stimulation and activity, and poor diets. Food insecurity also affects the quality of children's diets, which brings increased risks of obesity and poor child growth. The magnitude and importance of childhood food insecurity requires systemic change, rather than short term, ad hoc projects.

CEO, Community Law (CLS)

- Whilst Community Law (CLS) have directly referred 42 clients to a food bank in the last 12 months, it considers a lot of its work prevents the need to make such referrals. CLS also has a policy of only making such referrals when the individual is its client and actively engaging with advice; this is to prevent a foodbank referral simply be used as a 'sticky plaster' to solve a problem in the short term rather than addressing the long term or underlying reason for the need. For the last 6 months, CLS has held a fortnightly advice session within the Cafe at Emmanuel Church when they hold their foodbank session. Since it started there, it has advised 52 people, all of whom have presented as being in need of food, but who also have expressed that their issues with food are related to money issues. It provides the people it sees with advice on benefits, debt and fuel poverty all to provide a holistic approach to addressing the difficulties they have with a view to reducing the risk of them returning to food poverty in a very short period of time
- Independent benefit, debt and fuel poverty advice is very effective and addressing food poverty. It places people in the best possible position to be able to afford food. It does this in a number of ways:
 - It ensures people are accessing all the money they are entitled to

- Their debts are managed by making realistic and affordable arrangements/moratoriums agreed
 - All relevant grants are applied for to clear any energy debt
 - People know what is a priority and do not spend their limited funds on things which are not a priority at the expense of essential items
 - People's outgoings are reviewed and reduced wherever possible, such as checking energy supplier and switching where appropriate
- To receive an understanding of how food poverty is addressed CLS provide specialist benefit, debt and fuel poverty advice. One of the root causes of food poverty is usually related to lack of money to buy food. The advice set out above addresses this.
 - It is also an agency who make active referrals to foodbanks as appropriate so that people are not left without food. CLS along with numerous other agencies, retain emergency food which is donated by staff and given to clients when there is not an available food bank session.
 - CLS believes investment in independent advice to address the money issues people in the borough are facing is one very positive way to address food poverty. Demand outstrips supply presently with almost every drop-in advice session held at the Guildhall being oversubscribed coupled with a 2-3 wait for appointments. Staff are placed under a lot of pressure, trying to respond to more urgent cases and manage large caseloads due to a lack of available appointments.

Director, RE: STORE

- Poverty as a whole is complex and multi-faceted, there is no single cause or single solution. Families and individuals facing food poverty have often faced many other types or aspects of poverty, including insecure housing, lack of finance fuel (so no heating/lighting/cooking facilities), adequate clothing and essentials. This has a negative impact on physical and mental health, especially if lived experience for several years (or in some cases for multiple generations). In the same way, food poverty increases this spiral of deprivation. Those accessing emergency food provision are most often desperate and ashamed, at their lowest point. Restore offers hope, dignity and solutions to a way forward. This can be practical - addressing housing needs, access to benefits, or building skills to work towards employment or become more self-sufficient. Many have reported that they

are isolated and unsupported elsewhere, so Restore also offers emotional and spiritual support and care, through welcoming into a safe non-judgemental environment, listening, signposting to specialist services such as MIND, offering prayer where appropriate, and building peer support.

- Food poverty covers all areas of our borough, and some are more actively mobilised to address their need through food banks, whereas other areas (cultures, age groups, communities) may be more self-sufficient or support themselves within their own communities. However, it does know that Central Northampton has a significantly higher number of clients accessing Northampton Food Bank and our related services than any other area, with more than double the number in the next postcode area. This Data has been collected from the Distribution Points of Northampton Food Bank across the town (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton).
- Below the table highlights client location. Further breakdown. The highest areas of need are as follows (based on 100-400 clients in this postcode area): NN1 - ALL Northampton Central NN2 6 & NN2 7 - Kingsthorpe, Kingsley Park, Semilong, Sunnyside, Whitehills NN3 2 - Abington (Birchfield Rd area) NN3 5 & 8 - Lings, Blackthorn, Goldings, Thorplands, Rectory Farm NN 3 9 - Little Billing NN4 8 - Briar Hill, Far Cotton & Delapre NN5 5 - St James NN5 7 - Kings Heath:

Re:store Northampton Referrals Nov 2019

	Number Clients		
NN1	1862	NORTHAMPTON	Northampton
NN2	799	NORTHAMPTON	Kingshorpe , Boughton
NN3	1035	NORTHAMPTON	Abington (East), Bellinge, Blackthorn, Boothville , Ecton Brook, Great Billing, Headlands, Kingsley Park, Lings, Little Billing, Moulton, Moulton Park, Rectory Farm, Round Spinney, Southfields, Spinney Hill, Standens Barn, Weston Favell
NN4	366	NORTHAMPTON	Brackmills , Delapré , East Hunsbury , Far Cotton , Grange Park , Great Houghton , Hardingstone , West Hunsbury , Wootton
NN5	784	NORTHAMPTON	Duston, New Duston Kings Heath, St James, Dallington, Spencer, St Crispins, Upton
NN6	51	NORTHAMPTON	Brixworth, Cold Ashby, Crick, Earls Barton, Ecton, Gullsborough, Long Buckby Spratton, Sywell, West Haddon, East Haddon, Chapel Brampton, Church Brampton
NN7	59	NORTHAMPTON	Blisworth , Bugbrooke , Castle Ashby , Cogenhoe , Dodford , Flora Gayton , Grafton Regis , Hackleton , Harpole , Harlestone , Hartwell , Horton , Milton Malsor , Nether Heyford , Piddington , Preston Deanery , Quinton , Roade , Rothersthorpe , Stoke Bruerne , Weedon Bec , Yardley Gobion , Yardley Hastings
NN8	39	WELLINGBOROUGH	Wellingborough , Wilby
NN9	4	WELLINGBOROUGH	Wellingborough , Chelveston , Finedon , Great Harrowden , Irthlingborough , Little Harrowden , Raunds
NN10	2	RUSHDEN	Higham Ferrers , Rushden , Wymington
NN11	19	DAVENTRY	Braunston , Daventry , Greens Norton , Hinton , Moreton Pinkney , Welton , Lower Shuckburgh
NN12	16	TOWCESTER	Abthorpe , Caswell , Greens Norton , Silverstone , Towcester , Weston
NN13	2	BRACKLEY	Brackley , Croughton , Farthinghoe , Hinton-in-the-Hedges , Westbury , Turweston , Mixbury
NN14	2	KETTERING	Broughton , Desborough , Geddington , Isham , Pytchley , Bothwell , Thorpe Malsor , Thrapston , Hardwick
NN15	3	KETTERING	Burton Latimer , Barton Seagrave
NN16	7	KETTERING	Kettering
NN17	1	CORBYP	Bulwick , Corby
NN18	2	CORBYP	Great Oakley , Little Oakley
NN29	2	WELLINGBOROUGH	Bozeat , Great Doddington , Irchester , Podington , Wollaston
No Fixed Abode	38		
TOTAL	5093		

- Together Re-Store seeks to work collaboratively to tackle food poverty, joining together services which offer food banks, food co-operatives, zero-waste schemes, and other forms of meal provision. Most of these services area crisis provision, with some services, like Re:store also addressing the reason for food poverty and helping people to make positive changes. The Network also advocates and campaigns for change at a local and national level.
- Re:store operates Northampton Food Bank with Distributions Points across the town and across the whole week (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton). This is a referral based system, where households can receive 5 parcels a year, if they meet criteria (an interruption to usual income such as loss of job or benefit problems, so not just low income). Whilst around 5000 clients each year access this service, we are aware of thousands of households that are living in food poverty constantly that would not meet this criterion. Re:store offers a holistic response alongside providing crisis support through the Food Bank and Growbaby. The Distribution Point at Re:store HUB (Thursdays at Re:store) has professionals such as Citizen’s Advice and Mind on site to offer advice, support and guidance to deal with the cause or symptoms of the poverty.

We have a range of trained volunteers and a lead Support Worker to also support, assist and signpost guests to address issues at hand. There are a range of other skills based opportunities, including supported volunteering, available to assist individuals to move forward from the point of crisis. Northampton Food Bank has always aimed to offer a hand up not just a hand out. Provision has changed and adapted over the years in response to the need and 3 other local service provision. For example, from 2017-19 we were offering a free hot meal twice a week, but as numbers increased and support needs were not being addressed as effectively it highlighted a dependency on the “hand out”. Instead now the community cafe (HUB) is coffee & cake and there is an emphasis on support element, whilst still being friendly and welcoming to all.

- Local charities and churches are attempting to address food poverty (in terms of emergency help) but actually there are systemic problems which are resulting in food poverty which are not being addressed, so the problem will never actually be resolved unless all parties work together to identify these problems and address them - and those experiencing food poverty need to be involved in this process. 7. How can the Borough Council, together with its partners, can collectively respond to food poverty? A good start would be to meet with Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network - gathering together all those working with the public, and also inviting those who have experienced food poverty. Hearing the reality first hand, and working out solutions together. It is a problem that the “Big Society” cannot solve alone. 8. In your opinion what are the specific issues relating to food poverty? Partly answered in the first questions, but our experience (evidenced by Citizen’s Advice on site) is that the main problems that are related would be housing insecurity (threats of eviction, short-term tenancies, lack of access to affordable housing etc) and financial barriers (benefits being interrupted/stopped, unfair sanctions which take time to appeal, zero-hour contracts, job insecurity). Many of those experiencing food poverty have previously worked or are working but lacking job security or the hours ‘promised’ on zero-hour contracts - often not being told that they are not needed until they turn up for work. Being on such contracts prevents access to benefits and lack of work means individuals cannot pay rent/bills/buy food etc. At a local government level, the lack of community and support services in Northampton has an impact on the most vulnerable in the town. Many adult and family services have been cut, including mental health and elderly care, meaning voluntary services are left to plug the gap. Likewise, the closure of community facilities such as libraries, and lack of investment in local parks, places and activities, means a reduction in community cohesion and peer support. Whilst this seems detached from the issue at hand, actually it has a dramatic impact as so many of those we support are isolated and do not know where to go for support, and certainly lack help from within their local community.

- Yes Restore is aware of holiday hunger, it has run special lunches though Summer 2019, and the year before, 2018 special food provision through the food bank. Both operated through referrals from local schools, identified by the Family Support Worker. However there was a low uptake to both projects. This does not reflect the lack of need, but the stigma and fear for families that still is attached to community projects addressing food poverty. However Re:Store is now engaging 60-80 adults and children each week through our family outreach activities, so feel this may help to overcome this.
- Northampton Food Bank Re:store operates Northampton Food Bank with Distributions Points across the town and across the whole week (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton). This is a referral based system, where households can receive 5 parcels a year, if they meet criteria (an interruption to usual income such as loss of job or benefit problems, so not just low income). All food donated by individuals in Northampton, all volunteers from the local community. Growbaby Provision of food, clothes, toys and baby equipment (0-5yrs). Referrals from range of family support services, and donations from the local community. Drop-in session with a welcoming play area, free snacks and a more private area where the parent/ caregiver can select the clothing they need for their child as well as talk to our team for further practical or emotional support. Nest Award-winning play session with range of support services on site (including health professionals). Range of play activities led by qualified professionals working in voluntary capacity. Free snacks and high quality music time. Open to all, no referral needed. Attracts range of families from all backgrounds, including many with English as Second Language or who are otherwise isolated or vulnerable. Re:store Hub Free community cafe, with advice and support services, including Citzien's Advice. Access point for Northampton Food Bank. Various courses and opportunities running alongside this including wellbeing classes and money management support. Allotment Re:store Allotment is a volunteer led project, that seeks to grow skills and independence through growing fruit and vegetables. Participants are invited for a 4- 5 week course, to learn how to sow, grow and harvest edible plants, and welcomes complete beginners through to those with green fingers! Inspire Supported volunteering and mentoring scheme. Providing training opportunities and support to gain skills for life. It is ideal for those who are either struggling with confidence and self-esteem, are out of work, or wanting to develop skills in the workplace. The programme is tailored to each individual, with personal goals being set that are worked towards. Individuals are paired with a suitable mentor from Central Vineyard Church who meet up with them regularly to support them in reaching their goals.
- Despite Re:store running a town-wide Food Bank, it is not a long term solution to food poverty. 10 Years ago it began as a short-term support, but the extent it is now used highlights it has become part of the expected support network for the

town. The local government needs to look at policies that impact the most vulnerable and support services (or the closure of them).

CEO, Citizen's Advice Bureau

- CAB uses a case book system that tracks key issues and the statistics can be narrowed down by Borough, Ward etc.
- An example of case work was provided: a woman needed food for her 7 year old as well as nappies and milk for her 4 month old, she wouldn't go to a food bank but wasn't able to budget properly and had not receive the correct advice. She had presented at CAB for advice and support
- There is often a shortfall in the housing benefit and what landlords charge for rent
- CAB pays rent for its space in the One Stop at the Guildhall and that further grants would be of assistance
- CAB supported the Council Tax reduction scheme of 34% but would support 100% for the most vulnerable
- Council Tax is not proportionate to people's incomes. 50-70 Local Authorities in England and Wales provides 100% reduction in Council Tax to the most vulnerable
- CAB has found that 55% of people that claim Universal Credit have gone without essentials compared to 37% of those on legacy benefits
- People are now coming in to CAB for advice regarding day to day debt

3.6 Deputations to the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel

Public addresses and deputations were made to meetings of the Scrutiny Panel, key points:

- NBC is a Living Wage Foundation Living wage employer. It needs to take the next step and make it a contractual obligation for its contractors.
- Holiday hunger is about children not being able to access a hot meal during the school holidays. It is a real, material deprivation.
- Food poverty does not sit on its own. Many households, with children, cannot use food bank food because they cannot cook- because they have no cooker, or no fuel, or no pots- or none of these. Poverty goes very deeply over time, eroding all resources. Some poverty is more visible than others. Households with children are not particularly vulnerable and are particularly vulnerable.
- BAME communities are not well served by food banks. Often their dietary needs are not met at all.

- 16-18,000 children in Northampton are living in poverty.
- Often children in poverty come from a working family.
- There is a need for both the County Council and Northampton Borough Council to have an Ant-Poverty Strategy

3.7 Desktop research - Published reports and Data

Child Poverty Action Group (End Child Poverty) - Statistics

3.7.1 The Child Poverty Action Group reports a number of facts around poverty in general:

- There were 4.1 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2016-17.
- London is the area with the highest rates of child poverty in the country.
- Child poverty reduced dramatically between 1998/9-2011/12 when 800,000 children were lifted out of poverty. Since 2010, child poverty figures have flat-lined. The number of children in absolute poverty has increased by 0.5 million since 2010.
- As a direct result of tax and benefit decisions made since 2010, the Institute for Fiscal Studies project that the number of children in relative poverty will have risen from 3.6m to 4.3 million by 2020.
- Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one member works.
- Children in large families are at a far greater risk of living in poverty – 42% of children in poverty live in families with three or more children.
- Families experience poverty for many reasons, but its fundamental cause is not having enough money to cope with the circumstances in which they are living. A family might move into poverty because of a rise in living costs, a drop in earnings through job loss or benefit changes.
- Child poverty blights childhoods. Growing up in poverty means being cold, going hungry, not being able to join in activities with friends. For example, 50 per cent of families in the bottom income quintile would like, but cannot afford, to take their children on holiday for one week a year.
- Child poverty has long-lasting effects. By GCSE, there is a 28 per cent gap between children receiving free school meals and their wealthier peers in terms of the number achieving at least 5 A*-C GCSE grades.
- Poverty is also related to more complicated health histories over the course of a lifetime, again influencing earnings as well as the overall quality – and indeed length – of life. Men in the most deprived areas of England have a life expectancy 9.2 years shorter than men in the least deprived areas. They

also spend 14% less of their life in good health. Women share similar statistics.

- Child poverty imposes costs on broader society – estimated to be at least £29 billion a year. Governments forgo prospective revenues as well as commit themselves to providing services in the future if they fail to address child poverty in the here and now.
- Childcare and housing are two of the costs that take the biggest toll on families’ budgets.

Source: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/key-facts/>

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

Statistics produced by the Child Action Group in relation to children living in poverty in Northampton during the period 2017/2018.

% of children living in poverty 2017/18

ONS code	Local Authority	Before Housing Costs			After Housing Costs			
		Number of children	% of children	Percentage point change since 2016/17	Number of children	% of children	Percentage point change since 2016/17	
E07000154	Northampton	10891	18.6%		0.8%	15725	26.8%	-0.2%
ONS code	Ward	% of children		% of children				
E05008836	Nene Valley		11.7%				19.6%	
E05008825	Billing		25.4%				33.2%	
E05008826	Boothville		7.9%				16.5%	
E05008848	Semilong		30.4%				40.8%	
E05008844	Riverside		16.4%				28.7%	
E05008837	New Duston		9.0%				16.5%	
E05008849	Spencer		27.7%				35.6%	
E05008828	Castle		27.9%				36.2%	
E05008852	Talavera		34.5%				37.7%	
E05008854	Upton		15.6%				25.3%	
E05008846	St David's		21.2%				31.8%	
E05008841	Parklands		7.5%				15.7%	
E05008824	Abington		14.6%				24.6%	
E05008840	Park		12.1%				17.5%	
E05008831	Eastfield		18.3%				26.0%	
E05008853	Trinity		16.5%				27.5%	
E05008851	Sunnyside		12.5%				22.2%	
E05008847	St James		16.8%				28.3%	
E05008835	Kingsthorpe		8.3%				18.7%	
E05008827	Brookside		32.2%				37.3%	
E05008855	West Hunsbury		19.1%				28.3%	
E05008834	Kingsley		13.8%				23.6%	
E05008845	Rushmills		15.8%				22.0%	
E05008838	Obelisk		13.5%				23.9%	
E05008830	East Hunsbury		9.3%				16.3%	
E05008832	Headlands		18.2%				24.8%	
E05008829	Delapre and Briar Hill		19.8%				28.6%	
E05008839	Old Duston		13.7%				23.7%	
E05008833	Kings Heath		26.4%				34.5%	
E05008850	Spring Park		9.1%				17.6%	
E05008843	Rectory Farm		32.0%				36.6%	
E05008856	Westone		10.0%				18.2%	
E05008842	Phippsville		17.8%				25.6%	

United Nations Report: Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

3.8 A report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights was received by the Human Rights Council in June and July 2019.

3.8.1 The reported summary of the report is detailed below:

“Summary The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, undertook a mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018. Although the United Kingdom is the world’s fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated. The social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities’ budgets, which have eliminated many social services, reduced policing services, closed libraries in record numbers, shrunk community and youth centres and sold off public spaces and buildings. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos. A booming economy, high employment and a budget surplus have not reversed austerity, a policy pursued more as an ideological than an economic agenda. “

The key sections of the report are around:

- a. Government’s reaction to preliminary findings
- b. Understanding poverty in the UK
- c. Dismantling the safety net
- d. Shortcomings of Universal Credit
- e. Poverty amongst specific groups
- f. Devolved administrations
- g. Brexit

The full report can be accessed [here](#)

3.9. The Trussell Trust – Published Statistics

A report of the Trussell Trust regarding the information that it publishes in relation to the number of emergency food supplies given to people in crisis by Trussell Trust food banks is published twice a year.

Trussell Trust reports that between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 its food bank network distributed 1.6 million three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis, which it states is an increase of 19% on the previous year. It goes on to comment that more than half a million of these went to children.

Regional breakdown of the figures for 2018/2019 are also reported by Trussell Trust.

East Midlands	Adults	Children	Total
	47,3331	28,328	75,659

Trussell Trust advises that its statistics are a measure of volume rather than unique users, and on average people needed around two food bank referrals in the last year. It collects its data by using an online system into which food banks enter data from each food bank voucher, and the number of three-day emergency food supplies is recorded.

An example is provided: “if a family of three was referred to a food bank twice in one year, this would count as six supplies on the system because it would reflect six instances on which a supply went to someone in the household. However, if a family of three were only referred to a food bank once, this would count as three supplies.”

It is highlighted by Trussell Trust that its figures cannot be used to fully explain the scale of food bank use across the UK, because our figures relate to food banks in our network and not to the hundreds of independent food aid providers. There are more than 1,200 food bank centres in its network across the UK.

Trussell Trust reports that the top three reasons for referral to a food bank in the Trussell Trust network in 2017-2018 were:

- Income not covering essential costs 33.11%
- Benefit delays 20.34%
- Benefit changes 17.36%

The full report can be accessed <here.C:\Users\ttiff\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\P13ME8YN\Summary>

House of Commons Library – Food Banks in the UK

The summary of the report detailed in the House of Commons Library – Food Banks in the UK (Published 1 October 2019):

“The primary source of data on food bank use is the Trussell Trust. This national charity provides food parcels to people referred to it by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and the Citizens Advice who meet certain requirements. Other charities also operate food banks or similar services, but there is no centrally collected data on them, except in Scotland. The data used here is mostly from the Trussell Trust, and so it should be considered incomplete – there are some areas where the Trussell Trust does not operate, but where other services may have delivered food parcels.”

This briefing has sections on:

- *The 2000 food banks in the UK, of which 1,200 are run by the Trussell Trust and 800 are independent*
- *Food parcel distribution statistics including the 19% rise from April 2018 to March 2019 in Trussell Trust figures*
- *Regional data; the North West being the part of the UK where the largest total number of Trussell Trust food parcels are distributed*

- *Food banks and parcels in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with Scottish independent food banks being available in addition to Trussell Trust statistics, permitting a more complete picture*
- *Government introduction of food insecurity indicators, following an announcement made in February 2019*
- *Other food aid provision, such as meal providers, social supermarkets and initiatives aimed at school children”*

The Briefing Paper makes specific reference to the research undertaken by the Trussell Trust, a briefing note detailing its research is contained in an earlier agenda item of this meeting.

A copy of the full report can be accessed [here](#)

3.10 Institute for Fiscal Studies Report: Living Standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2019

The introduction of the report of the Institute for Fiscal Studies states:

“This report examines how living standards – most commonly measured by households’ incomes – have changed for different groups in the UK, and the consequences that these changes have for income inequality and for measures of deprivation and poverty. In this latest report, we focus in particular on those people who are poorest in society, with two of our three main chapters focusing on poverty.

The analysis in this report is chiefly based on data from two UK household surveys. The first is the Family Resources Survey (FRS), a survey of around 20,000 households a year, which contains detailed information on different sources of household incomes. We use household income variables derived from the FRS by the UK government’s Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These measures of incomes underlie the DWP’s annual statistics on the distribution of income, known as ‘Households Below Average Income’ (HBAI). The FRS/HBAI data are available for the years from 1994–95 to 2017–18. They are supplemented by HBAI data derived from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for the years up to and including 1993–94. We also use data from the FES, and its later equivalents the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) and the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF), to look at measures of households’ expenditure to help us to measure and understand the material living standards of poorer households.

The main outcomes of interest in this report are measures of household income. We use the measure of income that is used in the HBAI statistics. A few key points are worth summarising here:

- *Income is measured at the household level, i.e. as the total income of all individuals living in the same household. A household for these purposes is not the same as a family, which is defined simply as a single adult or couple and any dependent children they have. For instance, young adults living together (other than as a couple) would be classified as in the same household but not in the same family.*
- *Income is rescaled (‘equivalised’) to take into account the fact that households of different sizes and compositions have different needs.*
- *Income is measured after deducting income tax, employee and self-employed National Insurance contributions, and council tax, and it includes income from state benefits and tax credits.*
- *Income is measured both before housing costs have been deducted (BHC) and after they have been deducted (AHC).*

- All cash figures are presented in 2017–18 prices and all income growth rates are given after accounting for inflation. We adjust for inflation using measures of inflation based on the Consumer Prices Index, which are the same measures as are used by DWP in the government’s official HBAI statistics.

Because the data on household incomes are produced and released with some lag, we complement the results using another data set, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), for which Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2019 Institute for Fiscal Studies the latest available data cover 2018–19. Although these data do not measure household income, they provide high-quality information on the UK labour market, trends in which are key in determining living standards. This data set allows us to present results that are more up to date than those using household income data alone.

Since all the analysis is based on a sample from the population, all estimated statistics are subject to sampling error. It is therefore important to gauge whether changes are large enough that we can be confident they reflect real changes in the population as a whole, rather than random variation in the sample from one year to another. We frequently test whether estimated changes are ‘statistically significant’. In our analysis, being ‘statistically significant’ implies that an estimate is statistically significantly different from zero at the standard 5% significance level.

The rest of this report proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 contains our analysis of changes in average incomes in the UK, and how incomes have changed for richer and poorer people, and the knock-on consequences for income inequality. We also examine how household incomes have changed for people of different ages in recent years. Chapter 3 analyses changes in poverty, and the living standards of poorer households in general. We examine how ‘material deprivation’ (the inability to afford important material goods and services) has changed for families with children and for pensioners. Finally in this chapter, we examine the increase in relative pensioner poverty that has occurred in recent years. Chapter 4 analyses measures of – and trends in – severe poverty, which affects people with incomes significantly below the headline poverty lines. This is challenging because household surveys struggle to measure those with the very lowest (and the very highest) incomes in society, so we make use of a range of data sources to do so.

Finally, accompanying the release of this report, the same authors have written a standalone working paper (Bourquin et al., 2019), which examines the gradual, but important, rise in in-work poverty (the poverty rate for working-age families living in a working household) in the UK over the last 25 years. In it, we look at the role that changes in the labour market, tax and benefit system, and housing costs have played in this development. It forms part of the research undertaken as part of this report.”

The conclusion of the report details:

“Conclusion - Before summing up, it is worth reiterating a point we made in the introduction to this chapter. It is always likely to be difficult, even with the large-scale household survey data that are typically used to analyse the distribution of living standards, to pick up the most severe forms of poverty in the UK or, as some call it, destitution. Populations such as the homeless will, by definition, not appear in these surveys. Of those who can appear in a household survey, those in the most severe hardship may not reliably respond, or it may be difficult to distinguish them from people who are in fact much better off but whose resources have been under-recorded.

It is possible that there is increasing severe hardship among a very small proportion of the population which is simply undetectable with any confidence in these key data sources. There is some evidence in this respect, such as a rising number of people rough sleeping. But none of the analysis in this chapter has spoken to the frequency of destitution in the UK. We have, however, tried to assess what has happened to more severe forms of poverty than those measured by the headline statistics.

On none of our measures of severe poverty do we find any evidence of a significant rise in severe poverty 'hiding' behind the relatively small changes seen in headline measures of income poverty since 2010–11. Material deprivation rates (using both more and less severe thresholds) have clearly declined over the period, and the frequency with which people report being unable to afford those items most indicative of more severe poverty – such as keeping the home warm or keeping up with bills and debt repayments – has fallen by about as much as the frequencies for other items. Income and expenditure measures of severe poverty suggest little change, however. This discrepancy is not due to material deprivation falling only among those families not in poverty, because we see declines across the income distribution. It may be partly explained by the basic items, access to which is tracked by material deprivation measures, becoming cheaper (relative to other goods and services), though this evidence is only suggestive. Looking over a longer period, the modest declines in headline income poverty that have been seen since the mid 1990s do not appear to be reflected in more severe forms of poverty, with income- and expenditure-based measures suggesting a small increase over the period. However, some of this increase is driven by those with very low incomes who in fact on average have higher living standards; more generally, the unreliability of low incomes in survey data and the long-run fall in the coverage of spending in the LCF mean that we should be cautious in putting too much weight on these results.

In general, we find that those regions and nations of Great Britain that have higher rates of headline poverty also have higher rates of severe poverty, whichever measure of the latter we use; though severe poverty is slightly more concentrated in London and slightly less concentrated in the rest of the South than headline poverty.

We also find that the composition of those in severe poverty is more tilted towards social renters and workless households than for those in headline income poverty. But these trends are changing: just as private renters and working households are making up an increasing share of those in headline income poverty, they are also making up an increasing share of those in severe poverty.

As already stressed, drawing conclusions about those in severe poverty is made more challenging by the limitations of the data available. Some of these difficulties are at least partially surmountable. For example, the under-reporting of income could be made less acute if surveys were linked to administrative benefit and tax records. The increased use of internet shopping and credit and debit cards also may make higher-quality expenditure data possible. Surveys themselves could be improved by expanding the sample size and putting more resources into ensuring that as many households as possible respond.

Such improvements would by no means solve every difficulty with the analysis of severe poverty, which is by its very nature a challenging topic to study. But the ability of policymakers to tackle severe poverty, should they want to do so, is somewhat dependent upon the quality of the data available.”

The full report can be accessed [here.C:\Users\ttiff\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\P13ME8YN\Summary](C:\Users\ttiff\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\P13ME8YN\Summary)

3.11 Children’s Future Food Inquiry

Detailed below is the executive summary of the Children’s Future Food Inquiry.

“The scale of the challenge

In a society that believes in compassion and justice, it is unacceptable that children's development is being restricted by the effects of poverty. The number of children experiencing symptoms of food insecurity, or whose family income is evidently insufficient to afford a healthy diet amounts to between 2.5 and 4 million; between 20% and 30% of all children in the UK. We cannot allow this to continue.

One in three children (4.1million) are living in poverty in the UK. For their families to be able to afford the Government's recommended diet, they would have to spend an estimated 35% of their income on food, once their housing costs have been taken care of. This is not a realistic option, given the restrictive effects of the rising cost of living, prevalence of low-paid, insecure jobs, and the freeze on benefits. On average, after housing costs, households with children spend around 18% of their income on food. A proportion of children living in poverty experience food insecurity. UNICEF estimates on the basis of a small but nationally representative survey that 2.5 million (19%) British children live in food insecure households. This means that there are times when their household does not have enough money to acquire enough food, or they cannot buy the full variety of foods needed for a healthy diet.

The devastating consequences

Hunger is an extremely debilitating experience. It damages physical health. It is a cause of great personal distress. It is a social harm. Food insecurity brings profound anxiety and stress into family life which can trigger depression, aggressive behaviour in children, a sense of hopelessness, and overwhelming stress for parents struggling to give their children the best start. It affects children's school attendance, achievement and attainment: children who are hungry in class cannot concentrate or may be disruptive. In addition, the long summer holidays are estimated to result in weeks of learning loss for some children through a combination of social isolation, low levels of stimulation and activity, and poor diets. Food insecurity also affects the quality of children's diets, which brings increased risks of obesity and poor child growth. The magnitude and importance of childhood food insecurity requires systemic change, rather than short term, ad hoc projects.

Our findings

We focus on three food settings that characterise children's lives: pre-school settings, school and home, and examine the policies and programmes in place that are intended to support children to eat well. We look at these settings in all four UK nations. We document the evidence on whether these policies are reaching children living in poverty, and we present the views of children and those who work with them on how these policies work in practice."

A copy of the full report can be accessed [here](#)

3.11 Site Visits

3.11.1

On Thursday 22 August 2019, Councillor Dennis Meredith (Chair), together with Tracy Tiff Democratic and Member Services Manager, met with the lead Support Worker for the Food Bank.

Key information gathered from the site visit:

- Restore's hope for the town is to see people's lives restored and for the town to be renewed, the town thriving, businesses growing and people happy and enjoying themselves.
- Restore has over 100 referral Agencies and began over ten years ago.
- Restore costs £100,000 to run and currently it receives a partnership grant from NBC of £6,000 per year.
- The Foodbank and Café is open from 10am to 12 noon, it is open to anyone who can have a free tea/coffee/squash and a pastry. The pastries have been donated by a local supermarket. Originally the HUB was open twice weekly but it was not an appropriate setting for families so it changed to a café style. On average there are normally around 30 attendees with 10-20 food parcels given out. Most food is donated by the public and there are various food drop off points. Fresh vegetables such as onions, potatoes, green vegetables, and root vegetables are useful.
- A number of the main supermarkets have a contract with "Fareshare" where donations made to the supermarkets go to the distribution centre of Fareshare and foodbanks have to pay for the distribution costs to receive the donations.
- Restore offers a wide variety of services in addition to being a foodbank – including: Tuesdays – "Growbaby" - family services and attendees can pick up clothes, food, toys and baby equipment. It is for children 0-5 2 years. CAB are present during each session as are Health Visitors, Homestart. This is the only centre in the town that also provides for families and is not just a foodbank.
- Dental hygiene is a problem with children with a number having to have their milk teeth extracted due to decay. A dental hygienist attends the family sessions.
- Tuesdays and Wednesdays are dedicated to family days. Around 50-60 come in. Music is played, children play and can have a snack. In the school holiday period more is offered for older children too and on a Wednesday a free school dinner is offered; around 20 attend but the centre could accommodate 60.
- 25% of people are living in poverty in Northampton.
- The organisation – Inspire, supports people to reach their maximum potential, providing mentoring and supporting people into volunteering. An

example was provided whereby a woman had come in for a food parcel five years ago and now runs the Inspire Project.

- Individuals are referred to restore from specialist Agencies, schools, GPs, Children's services, Money Advice etc.
- Restore receives very little help for donations from the main food outlets
- The Support Worker reported that zero hours contracts can create poverty. For example a Warehouse operative, on zero hour's contract, works nights and also volunteers at the Foodbank. Should he have no work at any given period, he still has the regular bills to be paid and does not receive benefits whilst working. He often gets ready for work, arrives at the depot to be told there is no work available that night
- The Support Worker advised that often individuals and families do not have a network to turn to should they have financial difficulties and pressures. They often then turn to high interest loan companies and pay day loans which can re-enforce the spiral of poverty.
- General referrals come mainly from CAB, Jesus Centre, and One stop shop. Individuals must meet generic criteria to be referred. People can access food parcels five times a year. Each food parcel is aimed to last three days. Should a repeat referral be required, there needs to be a new referral. Once referred, individuals can access foodbanks at different locations and times, which best suits them – for example Duston or Eastfield. The food voucher is valid for one week and it then expires.
- When individuals come for a food parcel from this Foodbank, they fill out a tick list of the types of food and supplies they require. Whilst the pack is being made up, they are directed to the café for a drink and a pastry. An example was given of client B who was seven months pregnant but had not told anyone. Restore helped her and got equipment for her such as a pram, mosses basket, baby clothes etc.
- In May 2019, 936 items were given out and £70,000 of food is given out each year, all of which is provided via donations. Restore does not spend over £800-£1,000 per year on extra supplies.
- From April to the end of the summer is the period when supplies are at their lowest and it would be useful if schools could be contacted regarding 3 potential donations. Most needed food supplies are tinned meat, tinned vegetable and UHT milk. A local allotment will donate excess produce to the foodbank and this is delivered on a Wednesday ready for the foodbank opening on Thursday. There is a need to wider promote this to other allotments. Any leftover fresh produce is given to the homeless.



Supplies



Food being sorted



A typical family food parcel for three days



A typical single person's food parcel for three days

On Monday 2 September 2019, Councillor Catherine Russell, together with Geraldine Mahney, Customer Services Manager, visited the foodbank – Seventh Day Adventist Church and met with key volunteers and visitors. This was a hands on visit where we greeted and supported visitors which gave us a great insight into how the bank operated.

Key information gathered from the site visit:

- Seventh Day Adventist Church are one of the six food banks and are part of RESTORE. Restore are a charity that support vulnerable people in Northampton through practical means.
- All foodbanks have access to RESTORE data base. Visitors will already have a voucher number and the volunteers will access the system and record those who have used the voucher.
- On Monday 2 September 2019 there were 65 open vouchers awaiting for people to visit a bank within Northampton.
- The site visit saw 11 visitors on Monday, of which 5 families (3 with 2 Children and 2 with 1) and 6 individuals.
- Vouchers are valid for 7 days but discretion can be used allowing an expired voucher to be used.
- The site visit met a lovely community of volunteers who regularly support Seventh Day Adventist Church foodbank. It is a huge commitment as the food bank needs setting up the Sunday evening in readiness for Monday.
- This particular food bank has 5 regular volunteers who attend most Monday's, a further 3 who attend occasionally.
- Setting up on a Sunday is done by the same four regular volunteers. This is due to the physical nature of moving boxes etc.
 - Storage within premises is not ideal as storage is upstairs.
 - Each week approximately £100.00 a week is spent to replenish (this food bank only).
 - Good relationships are formed with some supermarkets but there are discrepancies between what some supermarkets will and will not donate.
 - There is an additional cost for the large plastic storage boxes.
 - Bread is collected from Tesco on Sunday morning and Sunday afternoon, from 2 local Tesco stores. This is strongly reliant on two volunteers.
 - Monday AM fresh goods are collected from four Aldi and one Lidl stores. This can include more bread, fruit, veg, flowers etc. This is strongly reliant on two volunteers driving around to collect this produce before the food bank opens.
 - The products in the greatest demand include: - Long life milk, cereals, beans, pasta, rice, pasta sauce, drinks and toiletries, especially wet-wipes, shampoo and deodorant. Actions/concerns to consider:
 - Form relationships with companies who would donate boxes.
 - Obtain premises within this area that would accommodate a permanent food bank,

- One thing that would help tremendously is if premises were provided to allow the Foodbank to be setup all through the week and thus enable to doors to open on other days or evenings. It would also help to have it in a location in another part of town where there might be a greater concentration of people who require help from a Foodbank.
- Complete research on local supermarkets to identify what they do with food that is close to the expiry date and what additional support is available.
- Increase communication to encourage donations and support. NBC are part of the Northants Chambers networking group who meet regularly. Could we arrange for a presentation on food poverty and support from these business and provide contact details for RESTORE to make arrangements



4 Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 Overview and Scrutiny ensures that it adheres to the Council’s statutory duty to provide the public with access to Scrutiny reports, briefing notes, agendas, minutes and other such documentation. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Panels are widely publicised, i.e. on the Council’s website, copies issued to the local media and paper copies are made available in the Council’s One Stop Shop and local libraries.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Panel was mindful of the eight protected characteristics when undertaking this scrutiny activity so that any recommendations that it made could identify potential positive and negative impacts on any particular sector of the community. This was borne in mind as the Scrutiny Panel progressed with the review and evidence gathered.

- 4.3 So that the Scrutiny Panel obtains a wide range of views, a number of key witnesses provided evidence as detailed in section 3 of this report.
- 4.4 Details of the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken can be located on the Overview and Scrutiny [webpage](#).

5 Conclusions and Key Findings

- 5.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:

Definitions of Food Poverty

- 5.1.1 The Scrutiny Panel noted that there a number of definitions for food poverty. The definition used by Restore is the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet. It is about the quality of food as well as quantity. It is not just about hunger, but also about being appropriately nourished to attain and maintain health.” Additionally, there are clear links between levels of deprivation and food poverty. A key definition of deprivation used by local authorities is those areas (and their residents) which fall within the top 20% most deprived LSOAs nationally (i.e. Deciles 1 and 2 nationally). There are 422 LSOA’s in Northamptonshire. In the IMD 2015 release 69 of these were in the top 20% nationally, 29 in the 1st Decile and 40 in the Second. A further definition of food poverty according to the Department of Health is “the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”²⁴. It is closely related to household food insecurity which is the inability to be able to secure social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life²⁵. Hunger as a term to describe the physical feeling of insufficient food is used by a number of organisations working with people unable to afford food as a means of communicating messages to the wider public, including the Trussell Trust, FareShare, Magic Breakfast, and Church Action on Poverty. Hunger is one consequence of food insecurity but not an inevitability. The Department of Health defines food poverty as: ‘The inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.

Risks relating to food poverty

²⁴ Department of Health, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan, 2005

²⁵ <http://www.fao.org/3/y4671e/y4671e06.htm>

- 5.1.2 The Scrutiny Panel noted that the poor health and wellbeing and risk of chronic ill-health relates to food poverty are not only due to the direct dietary risks but also due to associated social and psychological impacts e.g. chronic stress related to food poverty and poverty more generally, poor school performance due to acute hunger, It is also important to consider the differences between acute hunger and chronic food insecurity.
- 5.1.3 Households that cannot secure adequate food that its nutritious impacts on food poverty and this includes poor health, chronic illness, poor mental health, crime, obesity, diabetes, heart condition and poor education.
- 5.1.4 The Scrutiny Panel recognised that food poverty can have a negative impact on both physical and mental health.

Food poverty - children

- 5.1.5 The Under Secretary has contacted all Head Teachers of primary and secondary schools in the UK to identify the issue of child food insecurity. Evidence gathering indicated that the impact of food deprivation meant children were living in relative poverty with 60% of the median income; this information could be provided to the Panel as he felt it was important so that the statistics could be cross referenced. He explained that food banks can't always provide fresh provisions therefore an understanding of the types of food offered would be a useful question to ask as there has also been some work done regarding the nutritional value of the food. As of the January School Census 2019, 11.7% (3934) of pupils were eligible for free school meals from a total of 33,642. A report, compiled by the End Child Poverty coalition, shows that 13,633 children are living in poverty in Northampton
- 5.1.6 The Scrutiny Panel realised that food poverty sits within wider poverty. Poverty within Northampton has increased from 16,000 to 18,000 children . There is a lot of concern and misery for the families throughout the area. Schools and health visitors are aware of this issue. The Scrutiny Panel highlights that there is a need to ensure that no children throughout Northampton are seen to be hungry. Holiday hunger is also an issue, and something needs to be done about this. It was noted that during the unprecedented situation of Covid19 that free school meals vouchers had been provided during school holidays and would include the summer break of 2020 also. It was further recognised that often children in poverty come from a working family. Regularly, people living in poverty have no electricity, saucepans or a cooker and obtain food from a food bank but do not have the facilities to cook it. There is a need for an Anti- Poverty Strategy.
- 5.1.7 The Scrutiny Panel notes that free meals are provided in nurseries in Scotland.

Food Poverty – reviews and statistical data

5.1.8 Central Government has confirmed it will begin to measure food insecurity from April 2019. Evidence gathering highlighted that in order to understand approaches to tackle food poverty it's important to understand the root causes of food poverty. An analysis by the House of Commons' Environmental Audit Committee "Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK" identified three themes relating to the causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition:

1. Low incomes and rising living costs:
2. Universal Credit and the benefits system; and
3. Cuts to funding for local social care services.

5.1.9 . Zero hours contract often have an impact on poverty and food poverty.

5.1.10 Food poverty is clearly linked to poverty more generally and poverty can be measured in a number of ways. One useful metric is "income deprivation" which measures the number of people who are in receipt of various means tested benefits. In 2015 the total number of people affected by income deprivation in Northampton was 27,279²⁶ of whom 7,806²⁷ were children and 6,193²⁸ older people.

5.1.11 A review by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust "Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK"²⁹ gives the following recommendations for preventing need for food banks:

- Improve access to short-term benefit advances: increase awareness, simplify the claim process and improve data collection to identify support needs.
- Reform sanctions policy and practice: increase access to hardship payments, clarify communications about sanctions, mitigate the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered and address issues for Housing Benefit.
- Improve the ESA regime: ensure claimants are not left without income whilst challenging a decision made because of missing medical certificates or missed appointments.

²⁶ Income Deprivation domain of [Indices of Deprivation 2019](#)

²⁷ [IDACI 2019](#)

²⁸ [IDOP1 2019](#)

²⁹ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Foodbank%20Report_web.pdf

- Sustain and improve access to emergency financial support through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes.
- Ensure Jobcentres provide an efficient and supportive service for all clients.
- Improve Jobcentre Plus Advisers' awareness of, and ability to respond to, mental health problems.
- Improve access to appropriate advice and support.

Emergency Food Aid

5.1.12 Use of emergency food aid (i.e. food banks) can give an indication of the levels of need around acute food poverty. Food Banks are primarily for adults and families and the Scrutiny Panel noted that it is important that children have direct access to food through schools and nurseries. Initiatives are in place as schools for those children that come in hungry such as free breakfast clubs. They are therefore provided with both a free breakfast and a free lunch during school days. There is a good referral system into food banks. The Night Shelter is a good example of the positive impact good quality food can have on people's health and esteem. Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) runs a food bank and also makes referrals. It is a food bank for Council tenants. Volunteer tenants put the food parcels together however NPH delivers them which ensures dignity remains. Food parcels distributed by NPH was put in place due to the need for crisis intervention. The number of parcels and their locations is reported on a monthly basis

5.1.13 During the evidence gathering the Scrutiny Panel heard that Officers working in the Council's One Stop Shop, each month donate items of food that can be donated to those in need. This is funded totally by the staff who do this mainly because they come into contact with people on a daily basis that require food donations and other assistance.

5.1.14 Various statistics were provided to the Scrutiny Panel. The Emmanuel Church provides 40 parcels a week for around 100 people with referrals generally coming from schools. The Hope Centre has around 120 people come in for food daily whilst there is a separate food provision that helps 250 families per week. Re Store coordinate food parcels across 6 churches in Northampton Borough and in 2018 distributed 4500 parcels.

5.1.15 The Scrutiny Panel notes that it is expected that the food banking system would continue to grow.

5.1.16 Evidence gathered highlighted that teachers and social workers often note some children being uncomfortable in inviting friends home, due to the state of the home and poor quality food.

5.1.17 It is highlighted that there is a stigma around poverty and poor-quality food is also poor value for money

Assistance available and Partnership Working

- 5.1.18 The Scrutiny Panel recognises that there is a lot of assistance available regarding budgeting from organisations such as CAB, Housing and Money Advice and Community Law. The Scrutiny Panel recognised that approaches are often neighbourhood based; there is a need adequate funding and are reliant on skills and leadership and a strong voluntary and community sector. Approaches include:
- Voluntary action
 - Food banks
 - Community organising and social action
 - Neighbourhood enterprise
 - Community-based credit unions
 - Developing physical assets
 - Community-led housing
- 5.1.19 The Panel acknowledges that there are lots of Groups and organisations doing different things in relation to food distribution, which needed looking at collectively to ensure the sharing of information; which is very important across all of the Groups; as every Group needed to know about each other's work so that there was no duplication.
- 5.1.20 The Scrutiny Panel emphasised that, in the run up to West Northamptonshire Authority, there is a need to consider joint responsibility of Agencies regarding homelessness, poverty and food poverty. There is lots of partnership working and work completed already and there is need to be able to maintain drive. Evidence gathering highlighted that a main barrier is leadership. There is a need for strong leadership and a clear vision. Leaders should be drawn together to provide the necessary direction. The Scrutiny Panel further emphasised that there is a need to have individuals with the relevant passion to lead e.g. Food Poverty Champions who can identify the partners who have the motivation and drive to bring all together. Goals will be similar across all the boroughs and districts. With the move to the West Northamptonshire Authority, the Scrutiny Panel agreed that a way forward could be to use this issue to come together across the County and consider the following actions for local authorities recommended by Sustain:

- Developing a food action plan to tackle food poverty
- Improving the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers
- Promoting breastfeeding via the Baby Friendly Initiative
- Harnessing the value of children’s centres
- Ensuring low-income families have adequate access to childcare
- Ensuring children’s access to food 365 days a year
- Becoming a Living Wage employer and promoting the Living Wage
- Ensuring all residents have physical access to good food
- Supporting and enhancing meals on wheels provision
- Supporting financial advice services and providing crisis support

5.1.21 The Scrutiny Panel recognises that there is a need to do more to co-ordinate between food providers. Hope has worked with Northamptonshire Poverty Network but more needs to be done and co-ordinated. A summer festival, or similar, to “unlock” food would be useful. The Scrutiny Panel felt that the promotion of food poverty to allotment holders and shops would be useful regarding them providing any excess produce.

5.1.22 There will be full migration to Universal Credit from December 2019. As of 16 September 2019, there were 11,350 claims for housing benefit, in May 2019 it had been 14,000. There is a five-week waiting period for Universal Credit that has been causing issues and problems. Money management support is important for example pay bills such as rent first. A Council Tax Reduction Scheme is in place; everyone now has to pay at least 35% of the Council Tax bill for their property but some Groups are protected.

5.1.23 HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) works collaboratively with partner organisations to help people. It has a claim commitment, but it needs individuals to tell officers about their circumstances. Individuals can contact HMRC for assistance. HRMC works with food banks in Corby and Towcester and speaks with customers regarding their income and the types of support available to them.

5.1.24 The Universal Credit app is easy to use. In addition, there is a programme of training in place that comprises 39 vulnerabilities. Mental health training includes suicide and ex-offenders. A lot of outreach takes place through schools and advice can be given. It was recognised that the Manager, □□RC regularly visits NBC and is part of the Welfare Reform meetings; that comprise a number of partners. Improvements come from these meetings.

5.1.25 It was realised that some individuals are fearful to go to the Job Centre. There are lots of posters in the Job Centre regarding partner agencies. A lot of outreach takes place through schools and advice can be given. The Scrutiny Panel felt this was not sufficiently aimed at Northampton.

5.1.26 The Scrutiny Panel supports the living wage employer.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel was to:

- To examine the extent to which individuals and families are experiencing food poverty, the range of contributing factors and the changes that have been made to the way the Council and partners support residents during hardship.
- To review the impact and concentration of food poverty across the Borough of Northampton

Key Lines of Enquiry

- What are the impacts of food poverty?
- How widespread is food poverty in the borough?
- What strategic approaches are in existence to tackle food poverty?
- What approaches are in existence to reduce people's dependency on food aid, such as Food Banks? To receive an understanding of how food poverty is addressed
- To evaluate how the Borough Council, together with its partners, can collectively respond to food poverty
- To identify the specific issues relating to food poverty
- To identify the existence and impact of "holiday hunger"
- To identify how food poverty differs across the borough of Northampton and the reasons for this

6.1.2 Scrutiny Panel 1 therefore recommends to Cabinet that:

6.1.3 That a Working Group, owned by the Community and Engagement Team, is set up and tasked with analysing the gaps in foodbanks within Northampton and the Working Group works with Partners to seek solutions to increasing food provision within these areas.

6.1.4 That child poverty needs are included in any Strategy in relation to poverty. food poverty strategy and note that the process of developing an Anti-Food Poverty Strategy can of itself have wider impacts such as:

- Raising the profile of food poverty, especially with local decision-makers
- Developing a shared positive vision
- Creating a sense of empowerment for experts by experience
- Empowering diverse groups to raise their voices to call for food justice
- Ensuring the local council and other partners take ownership of agreed actions
- Sharing of good practice across local authority boundaries to support specific projects

6.1.5 That Food Poverty Champions, who can identify the partners, who have the motivation and drive to bring all together lead on the production of an Anti-Food Poverty Strategy, which must include all demographics, ensuring that it is an all inclusive Policy is investigated.

6.1.6 That with the move to the West Northamptonshire Authority, the way forward in relation to the production of an Anti-Food Poverty Strategy including the following adopted actions for local authorities as recommended by Sustain:

NB: The Scrutiny Panel updated some the actions recommended by Sustain so that they are more Northampton based

- Developing a food action plan to tackle food poverty
- Improving the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers
- Promoting breastfeeding via the Baby Friendly Initiative
- Promoting the need for children's centres
- Ensuring low-income families have adequate access to childcare
- Investing and developing children's access to food 365 days a year
- Becoming an accredited Living Wage employer and promoting the Living Wage
- Ensuring all residents have physical access to good food
- Supporting and enhancing meals reasonably priced and the provision of meals to vulnerable people
- Supporting financial advice services and providing crisis support

6.1.7 That a Working Group, led by the Community and Engagement Team, is set up and tasked with identifying areas where holiday hunger is a concern and to seek solutions to increasing food provision for children 365 days a year. In addition the outcomes that have come out following the Marcus Ashford Scheme within Northampton are continued and built upon to ensure food provision is developed for all children 365 days a year.

- 6.1.8 That the Manager, HM Revenues and Customs is formally invited to visit food banks in Northampton, to work with customers and aid regarding budgeting and where further help can be obtained.
- 6.1.9 That the Universal Credit app. Is widely promoted.
- 6.1.10 That Officers are instructed to work with partners in generating more events such as a summer festival where assistance in relation to food poverty can be highlighted.
- 6.1.11 That the Health Start Voucher Scheme is promoted.
- 6.1.12 That promotion of food poverty is highlighted to allotment holders and shops regarding giving away excess produce as emergency food aid.
- 6.1.13 That it is recommended to Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) that it considers reviewing Tenancy Agreements to ensure that support is provided to older people to ensure that they are in receipt of the correct pension credits.
- 6.1.14 That the Northampton Community Forums are asked that a presentation is given to each Forum, in particular the Older People's Forum, that promotes the provision of pension credits and how this can be applied for.
- 6.1.15 That a Grants Officer is engaged with the main role of investigating funding for crisis support and the Grants Officer works closely with all organisations in this respect.
- 6.1.16 That it is recommended to the West Northamptonshire Authority that West Northamptonshire becomes a living wage Authority and a sustainable food Authority.
- 6.1.17 That the West Northamptonshire Authority is asked to lobby for national campaigns and challenge national Policy on food poverty.
- 6.1.18 That a copy of this report is provided to the MPs within West Northamptonshire and the MPs are asked to respond to the recommendations, in particular, recommendation 6.1.16.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6.1.19 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report.

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